The Boys and Girls Book of Story & Tale

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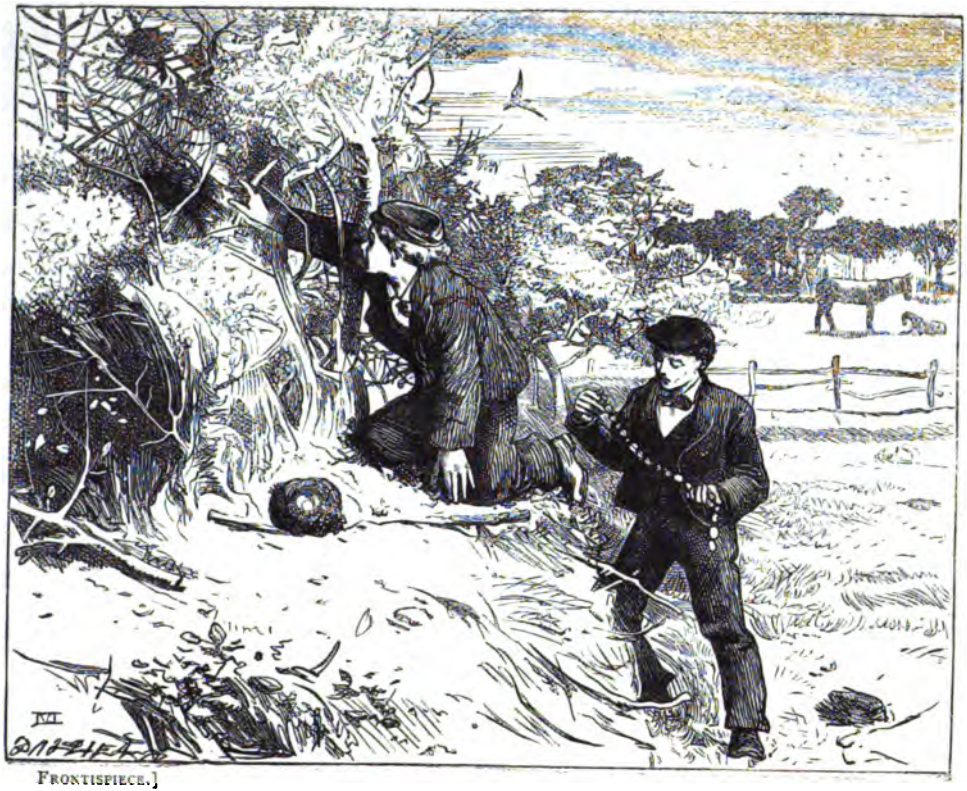
THE BOYS' AND GIRLS' BOOK OF STORY AND TALE.



FRONTISPIECE.]

THE BOYS' AND GIRLS' BOOK OF STORY AND TALE

WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS

STRAHAN & COMPANY LIMITED
34 PATERNOSTER ROW LONDON
1881

CONTENTS.

AT MISS LAMBLION'S:

A STORY OF PREPARATORY SCHOOL LIFE.

I.

IS it a good thing to be the only boy and the youngest child in a family of four? That depends, of course, on what you mean by a good thing; but I am inclined to think that the little boy, if he only took the trouble to form any opinion on the subject, would pronounce himself to be a very lucky fellow. Just see how he gets patted by mamma, and even by papa, by grandpapa and grandmamma, and uncles and aunts on both sides, and his sisters look upon him as a prodigy of perfection of all kinds, and give in to him in everything—that is, at least, until he reaches the age when little boys seem to consider it to be a solemn duty to rend dolls limb from limb and then make buttered toast of their wax necks and faces, and carry off the contents of their sisters' pincushion to feed their rabbits (sometimes, by-the-bye, forgetting to take out the "lost" needles which girls who have mischievous little brothers are likely to find buried by the score in bran if they rip open their cushions.

Little Dick Abbott was in full possession of all the privileges of the position I have described. His papa was vicar of a pretty village in—well, let us say Wessex; a very kind papa, and he had a very kind mamma, who was very fond of saying that she would not have her bonnie boy spoilt, because spoilt children were so disagreeable—through no fault of their own, poor little mites!—and, somehow, she managed *not* to spoil him, though she was so *very* fond of him, as well as of saying that she wouldn't, that it is almost wonderful that she didn't.

At the time my little story begins Dick's sister Lily was twelve years old, sister Annie ten, and sister Susie eight; all, in different ways, very nice little girls, though Lily did not consider herself a

little girl, but quite a grown-up young lady, and spoke with great condescension of the others as "the little ones." Dick was about seven, and since he was getting a little beyond the private governess's power to manage, and his papa had not time to attend to his lessons, it had been arranged that he was to go to Miss Lamblion's Preparatory School at Brackenbury.

Miss Lamblion was quite a celebrated personage in those parts. Dr. Birch, the Head Master of the famous Brackenbury Grammar School, said that her boys were the best prepared he got.

Dick did not exactly approve of going to what he slightingly called "a woman's school." Having emancipated himself from Miss Primer's gentle sway, he thought that he ought to go at once to "a regular boys' school, where big fellows go, and the teachers wear caps and gowns." His papa reminded him that Miss Lamblion, at any rate, would be likely to wear a cap and gown; whereupon Dick laughed, and said that he "didn't mean women's things." Altogether, however, he did not greatly object to his new school. It would be a step in manliness to go to school anywhere, instead of being taught by a governess at home, and if he must be taught by another woman, why Miss Lamblion, who was thought so much of by Dr. Birch, whose pupil Dick was afterwards to become, would be better than anybody else.

Dick paid his farewell visits in very good spirits both in the village and in and about the vicarage. He had a great many friends besides his own family and the servants to say good-bye to at the vicarage. He need not say good-bye yet to Floss—the pretty, silky chesnut mare, with the white star and the one white stocking, or rather sock—because he would ride into Brackenbury behind her long silver tail; but Jack, the family donkey, demanded visitation. Dick had once been very proud of riding on Jack, but latterly John, who was the vicarage groom, gardener, man-of-all-work, had often put him up on Floss, both bare-backed and when she was saddled for the vicar, and so Dick had come to look down on Jack as a steed fit only for "girls." Although Dick, in his way, was very fond of his sisters, he had learnt somehow to drawl out "girls" with most orthodox small school-boy contempt. Once, having by the practice which makes perfect, acquired so much Latinity from patient Miss Primer, he had run out in a hurry, for

fear he should, so to speak, drop his classical sarcasm on the way to exclaim, *Tu es asinus!* to patient Jack, who, however, did not appear in the least discomposed by the caustic brilliancy of the satire. Dick had no wish to wound Jack's feelings when he bade good-bye to him. He tickled his ears affectionately, but Jack received his friendly advances with the same calm indifference he had manifested when made the butt of his young master's wanton wit. Jack, like all (four-legged) donkeys, was a philosopher. Rover, the yard-dog, a big, black curly-coated retriever, mild as milk to all vicarage people, but surly as a bear with a sore head, or fierce as a raging lion, towards all non-vicarage ditto, was a good deal more demonstrative than Jack when Dick came to him. Rover stood up on his hind legs, put his fore paws on Dick's shoulders, gave him an Esquimaux kiss with his moist muzzle, and whined and looked sadly disappointed when Dick did not unbuckle his chain according to custom, but walked off, followed by Snap only—a consequential little black-and-tan terrier who was allowed to sleep in the house at night, and who had two oval tan spots above his eyes which looked comically like coloured spectacles pushed up on his forehead.

Dick was very fond of new milk, curds-and-whey, cream cheese, and "lots o' butter, please, Miss Primer;" but still he did not look upon the cows in the light of pets. The only fun he had been able to get out of them was when he had professed to help to drive them home, but had really come home swinging behind their swinging udders, as he held on to their tufted tails—unless, perchance, one of his sweet-breathed tugs had sent him on his back by a sudden kick; and when Strawberry had had a sturdy little bull-calf that objected to his riding him, and used to butt at him with a funny little bluff head knobbed with budding horns that looked like half buried marbles. Dick's good-bye to Strawberry and her sisters, therefore, was not very sentimental, nor was he more affected when he gave a last look to the pigs and the poultry, excepting his own bantams and perhaps the black-breasted red gamecock, and the strutting, gobbling turkey cock, and the hissing stiff-necked geese,—of all of which he remembered he had once been afraid, but which he had been brought to like after a fashion, as soon as he found that he could put them to flight instead of being put to flight by them.

But there were literal pets from which Dick found it rather hard

to part. The vicarage had a spacious old tithe-barn, used for storing, not tithes, but wood, coal, old boxes, and such like things, and still there was ample room. The children had a first-rate

"Always be a good boy, my darling."

swing slung from one of the cross-beams,—they could almost kick the roof when papa or John swung them. They played at hide-

and-seek, Robinson Crusoe, king-of-the-castle, smugglers, robbers' caves, all kinds of games in the old barn, and there they kept their "live animals"—which, sometimes, not from cruelty, but through excess of kindness, very speedily became dead animals. The chief proprietors of the miscellaneous menagerie were Dick, and Annie, the born naturalists of the family. She was never happier than when she could come home with, say, seventeen little frogs in her pinafore, a family of field mice in the bosom of her frock, or a toad or a newt, which she stroked and cuddled like a kitten. She ardently longed to catch a hedgehog,—she was even ambitious enough to hope that she might one day capture and tame an adder single-handed. The natural history specimens which Annie and Dick secured, little Susie, who was the born artist of the family, drew in pencil and crayon (white) on the walls of the barn, so that altogether it contained a very curious repertory of sights, scents, and sounds; birds, beasts, fishes, insects, and reptiles. Amongst them were children's ordinary favourites—doves, tame rabbits, guinea-pigs, white mice, silkworms, and so on; but the captured were more striking than the purchased pets. Dick, though half envious of Annie's skill in hunting, greatly respected it, and thought that she ought to have been a boy. He had told her so, and been exceedingly astonished to find that she was offended by what he had supposed to be the very highest compliment he could possibly pay her.

When Dick had torn himself away from the tithe-barn's treasures, there were still the parrot and the canary, and the goldfish and (in a contemptuous kind of way) the cat, in-doors, to be said good-bye to.

Then came an early dinner, and then came the chaise. Papa was in his seat, John had put Dick's little boxes into the back seat, and mamma, sisters, and maid servants had assembled to see him off.

"Always be a good boy, my darling," said mamma, smiling through her tears, as she gave him a farewell hug.

"Be sure you write regularly to me, as soon as you can spell properly, Dicky," cried matronly Lily, as the chaise drove out of the white gateway.

II.

Mr. Abbott, having dropped Dick at Miss Lamblion's, and introduced him to his schoolmistress, drove on into the town to transact other business. When he called in the evening to say good-bye, Dick's heart almost failed him. In spite of his desire to be "a man," he thought that he might have put up with good patient Miss Primer for a few months longer. When silver-tailed Floss pulled up in front of the school-house the second time, he could scarcely help wishing that he were going home with papa, to mamma, and sisters, and servants and pets. Miss Lamblion and her governesses had been kind enough to him. The boys had behaved as well as boys ever do behave to a new boy who has been allowed, as a favour, a fortnight after the day on which they were forced to assemble. But although (as he was sharp enough to see) Dick, as a new boy, had enjoyed some privileges, yet these very privileges made him feel the difference between school and home. They were nothing to the attentions he got every day from his mother and sisters, as a matter of course; and it was plain that he would soon not even get these—be simply Abbott, or Master Abbott, or Dick Abbott, No. So-and-so, amongst the forty or fifty occupants of Miss Lamblion's Establishment for Young Gentlemen.

Everybody with whom he had been brought into close contact before had always made such a fuss about Master Dick, that to be taken no notice of was an experience he could not understand. I really think that he would almost have preferred to be knocked about. However, papa should not see that he was a bit nonplussed, but carry home to mamma and "the girls" a glowing account of the manly manner in which he had said good-bye and sent them his love. After all, the stranger stories he would have to tell at home. How reverentially he would be listened to there as an adventurous explorer of foreign parts. The sensible thing to do would be to say "Good-bye, papa—love to mamma and the girls—kind regards to Miss Primer," with a cheerful voice and face, and then to make himself as comfortable as he could amongst the strange folk in whose midst he found himself.

And really, I cannot see that Master Dick had much to grumble about. He had had a fortnight docked off his first quarter's

schooling, and at Michaelmas, in the middle of the half (schools did not divide the year into "terms" when Dick was a youngster, as they do now), he was to have a little holiday at home. Miss Lamblion gave a few days then, but those of her boys who came from anything like a distance spent them at school.

So Dick bade papa "good-bye," and sent his love to mamma and the girls in the most valorous of styles, and then turned to make himself as much at home as he could with his new companions.

To most of these I will introduce you as they may be wanted in this little story; but I think you should know at once something about the three resident governesses.

Miss Lamblion was a lively, active, fresh-coloured body, whose age was a puzzle. Whatever it was, very probably she would look as young when she was a hundred, except that then her hair might be snowy, instead of simply streaked with silvery threads. By the popular opinion of the school she was credited with a more or less intimate acquaintance with everything down in her prospectus, even with the hard-named accomplishments of which no pupil knew exactly what they meant, because no "eminent master" at that time came to teach them. No doubt they had once been taught in the school, but there must have been giants amongst Miss Lamblion's "fellows" in those days. It was in Latin that she was supposed to be especially strong. Rumours were afloat that the great Dr. Birch, who had written not only a Latin but also a Greek Grammar, and Delectuses besides, had been heard to say that really he believed Miss Lamblion knew the Rules for Gender and the list of Irregular and Defective Verbs better than he did.

Miss Lamblion's special weakness was, by her pupils, believed to be her peppery temper. She was very proud of her boys, very fond of them; indeed, she would have gone through fire and water for them; but when she was put out, she did not scruple to box their ears with a vigour that brought fire and water to their eyes.

Miss Quinciner, the second in command, never struck her pupils, but for this she got no credit, the little boys attributing the abstinence to her dread of their superior strength and courage. It is possible that Miss Quinciner had received a more careful training for her calling than had been thought necessary for her

principal; but this her pupils would not admit. They took no pride in her prim accuracy, but delighted in hiding her spectacles. Miss Quinciner wore spectacles in school; when she was off duty she languidly waved about a golden eye-glass. Miss Quinciner was an old maid, who thought herself still young enough to be married. If she was not unkind to the boys, she was never actively kind to them, and so they did not care for her; but sent her saucy valentines, making her out to be a great-great-grandmother, of about 202 years of age and grandchildren.

But Miss Carter, the third teacher, *she* was a darling; so pretty and kind, though she was shaky in even her small Latin, and had to peep at the Tables of Weights and Measures before she could put down the Aliquot Parts in Practice, and Compound Complex Fractions completely floored her. Nevertheless, the whole school adored her, and the biggest boy, a Captain, or First Cock, who would be 13 (or stay, was it 12?) next birthday, was believed to have made her a solemn offer of marriage.

Miss Carter soon numbered Dick Abbott among her admirers, for going on that first night into the Little Boys' (*i.e.*, Littlest Boys') Dormitory, to see whether all were asleep, she found the new boy, in spite of his gallant resolve to be "a man," awake and sobbing in his strange little bed. Whereupon she kissed him, and sitting down by him, held his hand until he, too, fell asleep.

III.

Dick did not mind getting up early at home—now and then—because there he could wander about and do as he liked before breakfast. But, early in the morning of his first regular day at Miss Lamblion's, he did not relish being awoke out of a dream of home by the sharp tinkling of a bell overhead, followed by a "Now, my boys, be brisk," even though the command was given by the pretty lips of Miss Carter.

His schoolmates having discovered that Master Dick had a tendency to strut, so to speak, in talk as well as in walk, had already nicknamed him "Bantam."

"Now then, Bantam, cock-a-doodle-doo," cried the little boy who slept next him; "jump up!"

So Dick jumped up, and when he had partially dressed himself,

went into the lavatory, and at last got one of the long line of basins, and a peep at himself in a looking-glass—and was called "Dandy," and "Miss Nancy," now, because he was rather particular as to the parting of his hair. When the little boys were all fully dressed, Miss Carter came into their room to see that they knelt down and said their prayers; and these said, they filed past her, and rushed down the stone stairs to get their shoes out of their pigeon-holes in a little chamber which looked like a surgery with the drawers taken out; and thence they found their way into the playground, where the "big fellows" (at their head that love-sick giant of twelve, of whom I have told you) had already assembled.

There was only time for a run round the playground just to get a breath of fresh air, and then the school bell rang, Miss Quinciner cried "All in!" and the boys tumbled into the schoolroom, a cheerful double chamber, with folding doors which were never closed, on the ground floor.

Miss Lamblion examined Dick, and very proud he was at finding that, although he was the youngest boy in the school, he was not to be put into the lowest class, but the next above it. Of course, Master Dick took all the credit to himself; whereas I think patient Miss Primer ought to have had the greater part of it.

At the same time Dick was glad that he had not been put into a higher class still, since then he would have come under the immediate care of Miss Quinciner instead of Miss Carter.

Besides teaching the "big boys," Miss Lamblion took Miss Carter's classes every now and then; but of this also Dick was glad. He wanted to be taught by Miss Lamblion, that he might feel he was getting nearer the Grammar School. Miss Carter was very nice; still, if he had had to be taught by her only, he might just as well—or better—have stayed at home under a governess. Besides, Dick wanted to be able to show off again before Miss Lamblion, whom he supposed to be a prodigy of learning. Proud of the praises which she had given him, Dick set to work on the tasks that had been set him with so much interest that he was quite astonished, and half-vexed, when he heard the order given, "Put away your books for prayers."

When he had put away his books, however, he soon discovered that he was hungry for something more than Miss Lamblion's praise.

After prayers, the boys filed down to breakfast in the hall, on the basement, where they took their seats according to their year instead of their places in the school.

Miss Lamblion seated herself at the head of one long table, and Miss Quinciner at its foot; Miss Carter at the head of the other, and at its foot Mrs. Dow, a nondescript lady of miscellaneous functions, believed to be a poor relation of Miss Lamblion's. Now and then she came into the schoolroom very late in the afternoon, and heard some of the little boys read; but for the most part her time was devoted to housekeeping duties,—looking after the servants, the tradesmen, the cookery, the wardrobe, the packing up of the boys' boxes and taking places for them by the coaches at breaking-up time, and meeting them, unpacking their boxes, and comforting them when they came back. *She* did not get many holidays, though Miss Lamblion was too good-natured to let her keep slaving through the whole of the vacations, but always insisted on taking or sending her for a bit of pleasure somewhere. Though the boys teased and tyrannised over Mrs. Dow, they all loved her, and ran to her in all their scrapes, especially when they had to make their peace with Miss Lamblion. She was mistress-general of the sick-nursing department, and so kindly a nurse did she prove herself, that I am afraid Miss Lamblion's young gentlemen at times shammed sick, in order that, after a brief stay in bed, they might be able to enjoy a convalescent holiday with Mrs. Dow in the workroom.

Even the servants, although occasionally she had to bring them to book, could not help keeping a warm corner of their hearts for good-natured Mrs. Dow. They looked down on her a little because she did work like their own, and, like the boys, they teased her; but, like the boys again, they fled to her in all their troubles.

Next to this kind lady, Dick, as youngest boy in the school, found himself seated at breakfast. For that meal there had been provided plenty of good tea, or bread and milk, and bread and butter; and this plain but sufficient fare Dick's schoolfellows attacked with healthy boys' hungry enjoyment.

The fathers of Dick's schoolfellows were quite as well off as Dick's father, many of them far better; but Dick coming from a country place in which fowls and pigs and fruit cost next to nothing, had been accustomed to have eggs, or bacon, or jam, as breakfast "relishes."

Accordingly Master Dick chose to give himself airs. "I can't eat such stuff," he muttered, pushing his well-filled plate of bread and butter into the middle of the table.

"There, run along, eat your breakfast, and then have your play."

"Cock-a-doodle-doo! I'll eat it if you can't, Bantam," said the little boy who sat next him, in a whisper rather louder than would

have been allowed at the table watched over by Miss Lamblion and Miss Quinciner.

This was a joke simply, since the satirical young gentleman, although possessed of a fine appetite, had quite as much on his own plate as he could get through comfortably. Nevertheless, Dick felt the satire keenly, the more especially since he felt the sting of an appetite as keen as his satirist's, without similar means of satisfying it. He longingly eyed the plateful of bread and butter which he had desert-islanded, wishing that he were, indeed, monarch of all he surveyed; and hoping that if not one of the boys, at any rate Mrs. Dow, would push it back to him. What would mamma say of her letting him go without any breakfast! But Mrs. Dow took no notice of his tantrums, and Dick was too proud to take back his bread and butter without being told.

At last, however, when he was following the other boys into the playground, Mrs. Dow put some of the bread and butter into his hand, saying to him, with a smile, "Don't be a silly little fellow, Abbott. It's a long time to dinner, and you won't have anything between. There, run along, eat your breakfast, and then have your play."

IV.

Although Master Dick considered himself a proficient in all manly accomplishments, it must be admitted that in one or two, owing to his having had only girls for playfellows, he was somewhat lacking. For instance, he could spin a top only in the underhanded girls' fashion, and when at school he attempted to peg down after the manner of boys, at first his top either shuffled off its coil of string like a cast skin, and flew off like a stone, or if it did spin at all, it spun upon its side, finishing by lying right down and twirling round more and more feebly, like an impaled cockchafer in its last agonies.

Marbles, again, Dick played in the heterodox female mode, putting his taw between his finger tip and thumb nail, and when he was instructed to use the thumb knuckle instead, it was for a time quite an open question in which direction the taw would go. Sometimes it shot backwards; at other times it flew up and hit Dick upon the nose.

Marbles were "in" when he first went to Miss Lamblion's, and

his performances with them before the boys went in to forenoon school raised shouts of laughter, which mortified our young gentleman considerably, but at the same time did him good, inasmuch as they showed him that he was not quite the Admirable Crichton he had fancied himself, and stung him into a resolve to try to do everything so well that he could not be laughed at.

An hour or an hour and a half before breakfast, from nine till noon, from two till five, and an hour or an hour and a half after tea were Miss Lamblion's school hours; and since Dick's at home had been neither so long nor so regular, he felt at first very much like a caged bird. His studies at home were distinguished for peripateticism and excursuses. When in the schoolroom he was always darting about like a fly, and every now and then he made a dart out of it.

On that first morning at Miss Lamblion's, as he watched the hand of the schoolroom clock slowly crawling towards eleven, Dick yawned, and moaned within himself, "Oh, dear! there's another nasty dreary, weary, long hour to stick in-doors!"

Great, therefore, was his delight at finding that at eleven in the morning, and between three and four in the afternoon, Miss Lamblion allowed a run of five minutes in the playground, "to blow the cobwebs out of the brain," as she called it. These breaks seemed to Dick like shafts in a tunnel, and when he learnt, moreover, that on one or two afternoons every week he would be out of school for half-an-hour under the drill sergeant, he began to look upon Miss Lamblion's time-table as slightly less intolerable. At twelve the boys brushed up a bit, and went out for a walk, under the command of Miss Quinciner and Miss Carter.

At first they had to march in a Noah's ark double file up Castle Hill into the broad Bath Road, a very different thoroughfare then from the solitude it has become now. In the pre-Great Western Railway times the Bath Road was lively with mail-coaches and stage-coaches, travelling carriages, post-chaises, waggons, carts, vans, farmers in gig or on horseback, and Irish tramps—some of the men carrying straw-swathed scythes or sickles on their shoulders. At times there might be seen upon the road a wondrous vehicle drawn by gigantic kites, or a solitary specimen of the bicyclist of the period—a rider on a "dandy-horse."

At some high park gates on the left side of the road Miss Quin-

ciner gave the command, "Disperse," and dissolving their partnerships, the boys scampered down the long avenue of what we will call "White Ladies."

On both sides there were grass and tall elms with rooks cawing on them, and in the park more grass and trees, especially smooth, glossy-leaved, spreading beeches, and sturdy oaks, in one of which, year after year, there was a raven's nest. The house, which stood in an island of turf, separated from the park by a ha-ha, was generally shut up, and had a haunted look; but this, of course, made it all the nicer to look at.

The boys were never allowed to leap or scramble across the ha-ha. Neither were they allowed to go into the Deer Park; but, peeping between the grey, mossy, lichened palings of the fence, they could now and then catch sight of the deer, trotting singly, or galloping in herds, and then suddenly stopping and looking round half fearfully, half haughtily, grazing, browsing on the drooping lower branches of the trees, couched in great clumps of fern, or fighting with great clash of horns.

Altogether, White Ladies was a very nice place to walk out to. One of its chief attractions in the eyes of Miss Lamblion's boys was that it enabled them to give a new boy a surprise.

As Dick was standing on the bank of what he supposed to be a stream, watching the fish darting about, suddenly he heard a shout, or rather a chorus of yells, and looking under the bridge which crossed the water, he saw a row of his schoolfellows standing with their clothes on apparently up to their armpits in water, and yet looking uncommonly jolly.

Dick was greatly puzzled, but, running on to the bridge, discovered that they were standing dryshod behind a dam.

Miss Carter ran about with the boys, joining with them in the games they got up on the spur of the moment. Miss Quinciner thought this very undignified conduct on the part of Miss Carter, but although Miss Quinciner looked down on her for indulging in it, she was rather jealous of the higher esteem which it and her other kindness procured for her. When she chanced to be walking with Miss Quinciner, and boys ran up with wild flowers or oat-grass, or anything of that kind which they knew Miss Carter liked, Miss Quinciner, to show how superior she was in scientific knowledge to her companion, would take "specimens" and pull them

to pieces, and begin to talk learnedly about classes and orders, andrias and gynias, stamens and pistils, petals and sepals, corollas and calyxes, styles and stigmas, and all the rest of it; but the boys did not stay to listen to her, and Miss Carter got away as soon as she could.

Of course, between forenoon school and dinner there was not much time to spend at White Ladies; but on half-holidays the boys often had good fun in the Park.

His first visit to it had shown Dick that school life was not the shut-up-in-a-room kind of existence he had sometimes half-feared it might turn out to be. He went home to dinner in a good temper and with a good appetite. He did not give himself any airs at this meal; and indeed he would have been an ungrateful little donkey if he had done so. Miss Lamblion always gave her boys plenty of good food. She did not give putty-like pudding first to dull the edge of their appetite for meat. There was no "resurrection pie" served up at her school, with bones nicked and re-nicked Saturday after Saturday to establish and make assurance doubly sure of their identity. If a little boy cannot make a good dinner off lamb, with mint-sauce, peas, and potatoes, and damson pie, even though the crust be rather thick, he ought to be starved until he would be glad enough to swallow a "resurrection pie," notched bones and all.

When Dick went out into the playground after dinner he began to feel at peace with the school, himself, and things in general. For one thing he had got a chum, the little fellow who had been his satirist in the bed-room and at the breakfast-table, but also his partner in the walk and his playfellow in the Park. They had made friends there, and were now sworn allies.

Percy Sharpe was the chum's name. He was sharp enough in some things; but though he was a little older than Dick Abbott, he was not so "well on with his book." Peradventure Dick liked him all the better for that.

Although Dick was such a genius and a scholar, he had, nevertheless, found forenoon school—notwithstanding the five minutes' interval—somewhat of a strain upon his powers. He had had lessons both to say and to learn, and there had been so much going up and standing stiff in class.

Dick, therefore, was very pleased to find that the pace of after-

noon school was not nearly so rapid. In the first place he had to write a copy, but this was an operation which he could comfortably spin out, and yet all the while get credit for "taking pains." Then he had to do sums, but over these, too, he could take his time; and in the midst of his arithmetic there came the five minutes' run out, and after that came the drawing-master; and although Dick did not learn drawing yet, he could look at those who did, and attempt occasionally to vie in slate with their labours in lead pencil.

After that he had to read in class; and his first instructress being Miss Carter, and his second—Miss Carter having been called away to other duties—being Mrs. Dow, it seemed to Dick like rolling off wool on to down.

Both before and after tea there was glorious summer light for play. In the hour of evening school there were exercises to be written and lessons to be learnt, but still there were no lessons to be said. Dick was almost reconciled to school when that night he went to bed.

V.

THE love-sick giant's name was Fred Shum. He, as a "big boy," was one of the few of her pupils whom Miss Lamblion allowed at times to go into the town by themselves. If a little boy wanted to see more of it than he could catch sight of when marched through it, in the two and two procession for a walk, or to church, a lecture, Wombwell's menagerie, or any other exhibition, he had to get one of the big fellows to ask leave to take him with him when *he* had got leave to go out of bounds. But as this was very rarely granted even to the big boys, it was very, very seldom indeed, that a little chap got such a delicious outing.

But Miss Carter having made a pet of Dick, Frederick Shum, Esq., chose to make a pet of him also. Dick was too young to be looked upon in the light of a rival, and so, on the principle of "love me, love my dog," Fred was pleased to patronise him. One Wednesday Fred obtained permission to spend the half holiday in fishing and to take Dick with him. Fred was the proud possessor of a jointed rod, with which he boasted he had caught at home "loads" of fish. Somehow or other his fishing, during his stay at school, had never even covered the bottom of the basket, which

he pompously carried, when he went angling, knowingly slung from his shoulder.

Brackenbury has a river, with two branches as well as the main stream, flowing through it; a river which used to have to turn a good many mills, and bear a good many barges, laden with timber, lime, coals, etc.; and, in spite of two railways, I expect it has to do almost as much, if not more, to-day before it relieves itself of its responsibilities by falling into, or rather quietly uniting with, the Thames. Brackenbury has also a still more sluggish canal connecting its river with the Avon. In both these "waters"—yea, even in the Thames itself at times—Fred Shum used to cast angle: when he had to bring back his finny spoil to school, as I have intimated, with very small success. It was for the Sen (as we will call the town's river) that the two boys set out on that bright July afternoon. Dick had done a little fishing at home with a stick, string, and bent pin, but minnow and millers' thumbs, with now and then a stickleback, were all the fish that he had as yet caught, and even this he had been able only half to enjoy, because his sisters looked upon it as cruel,—as bad as bird'snesting. Mamma, too, although she had not forbidden these sports, because papa said there was no harm in them, had never taken any pride in Dick's success in either of them, as she did in other of his performances; and Dick was very fond of praise,—especially of his mamma's.

But now he was going out fishing with a big boy, who, as he thought, would think the more of him the more fish he caught. This was the first of Master Fred's fishing expeditions that half, and Dick knew nothing of his previous failures. Therefore Dick listened with almost awe-struck admiration as Fred told of the "quantities" of trout, tench, pike, perch, carp, chub, roach, eels, gudgeon, dace, bleak, barbel, flounders, he had caught in the Thames, the Sen, and the canal,—always, be it observed, at some distance from Brackenbury. As soon as they could get away from the dinner-table, the boys were off: Fred in full angler's fig, and Dick soon to be arrayed in only minor glory. He had come to school well provided with pocket money, and the half was young; consequently when Fred told him of a tackle shop where for 1s. 6d. he could buy a two-jointed rod, and line, float, gut, and shotted hook, and greaves, gentles, and live bait, too, if he wanted them, at an equally reasonable rate, Dick was eager to make his purchases.

The shop stood in old-fashioned Minster Street, easily distinguishable by a huge bamboo rod sticking out from one of the doorposts, from the end of whose line a very flat gold fish kept on spinning and sparkling in the sunshine. The window was filled with all kinds of tackle, rods, lines, floats, reels, gaffs, landing nets, etc., ready dressed flies, artificial minnows, fishing baskets, books on angling, and so on; and in the middle, in a glazed case, there was a great stuffed jack, like a little shark. The shop was kept by an old widower, who, whenever he could get away from his shop, was proving the excellence of his wares in some water or other. When he knew that any of the crack anglers of the neighbourhood, each of whom would have admitted that "Old Peters" was second best to him, were likely to want anything at his shop, he would stay at home to serve them, but the run of customers he thought his young widowed daughter and housekeeper, Mrs. Buskitt, fully competent to serve. And so, indeed, she was.

"Well, Master Shum," she said, smiling, when the boys went into the shop, "what can I do for you?"

"Is not your father at home?" counter-queried Fred, who considered himself one of the crack anglers of the neighbourhood.

"No, sir, he's out," answered Mrs. Buskitt, demurely, but half inclined to burst out laughing.

"Ah, well, it does not so much matter," Fred loftily replied. "I only want to buy some tackle for this little boy."

"Did you have much sport in the holidays?" asked Mrs. Buskitt, when that heavy purchase was completed.

"Not at first," said Fred. "The fish were spawning then, you know; caught some trout, though. But as soon as July came, you should have seen the baskets I took home."

There was something in Mrs. Buskitt's smile when she said that she wished she had, that led Fred to cut short the interview, and ere long the boys had reached the grassy river bank, along the top of which ran the towing-path. It was a glorious day, and Dick felt himself in clover; indeed, when he flung himself down on the bank, he crushed a good many wild clover heads.

Skylarks, yellowhammers, goldfinches, greenfinches, linnets, were singing merrily; willow-wrens chirping. There was a cheerful buzz of insects in the warm air. The river banks and the meadows beyond were yellow and white with buttercups and crowfoot. On

the other side of the river, willows dipped the tips of their bending boughs into the water; and, on the towing-path side, dwarf pollard stuck out at an angle of 45°, looking like sturdy big brooms that had burst into leaf. Here and there white and yellow water-lilies, half full of water, floated in the midst of their broad leaves. The bulrushes and bur-reeds were in blossom, and all kinds of green water-weeds were flowering and flourishing also.

Where they had stationed themselves, the tow-ropes of the barges and the canal boats for the most part passed over their heads, but sometimes, especially when two were crossing, the ropes fell into the water, making a splash and eddy by no means favourable for anglers' purposes. On these occasions Fred professed to be greatly disgusted; but Dick, to whom the Sen (to say nothing of the Thames) seemed a mighty stream, took an interest, even though he had come out to fish with his new fishing-rod, in the passing barges with their great brown spirit-sails triced up, and hay and straw half-way to the cross-trees; and the long narrow black canal boats, with their stripes of blue and white and red, their unbonneted women steerers, and their children passengers, with hair as shaggy as marsh-colts' manes, round staring eyes, and snub noses, often made snubbier through being raised to make faces at the boys upon the bank.

Fred went in for fly-fishing, and whipped away at a great rate but with no result. Time after time he changed his fly, but no fish rose to it. He grew tired at last of astonished Dick's repeated inquiry, "Haven't you caught anything yet, Fred?" and answered snappishly, "You look to your float, young un, or you won't catch anything either, and most likely not then."

Dick at this time, more by good luck than good management, had taken his stand near one of the slanting pollards, under whose root there was a hole, with plenty of flags and weeds about it. Soon after Fred had left him, to recommence his spiteful flogging of the disappointing river, Dick's float began to bob; presently it slanted, and then under it went, and Dick felt by the tug at the line that he had hooked something considerable at last. Round rattled his reel, and when the line was run out, tighter than ever was the tug. At last, however, as before, more by good luck than good management, he succeeded in hauling ashore, rather than landing, a fine carp. When he had reeled in his line, and secured

his flapping prize, he ran to the top of the bank to see what had become of Fred; floundering up in his excitement against

"Dick took his stand near one of the slanting pollards."

an old lady, very much like a dove in colour of dress and cooing voice, who was taking an afternoon walk by the river

side. This was Miss Knight, a Quaker lady, a friend of Mrs. Abbott's.

"What, Richard," she exclaimed, "art thee angling? And thee hast a machine, too! Would thy mother approve? And did thee capture that large fish?"

Seeing that the little fellow hung his head at the mention of his mother, the kind old lady went on—"Thee must come to see me, Richard, on some of thy half-holidays, if thy schoolmistress will grant permission."

As she went upon her way, Fred Shum came up. He looked very much exasperated when he beheld Dick's spoil.

"All chance, young un," he said, flinging the fish into his basket (with the intention of exhibiting it at school with a cry of "See what we've caught"). "Undo your rod and come along. It's no good trying this afternoon. The fish *won't* bite. This one must have run up against your hook by accident."

Of course Dick had nothing to do but to obey, although after such a gift of fortune, he would have very much liked to try his luck again.

But it was still a long time to evening school; what were the boys to do with themselves in the meantime? When Miss Lamblion gave the boys leave to spend their half-holiday out of bounds, I think she must have forgotten that it was fair-day. To be sure, there were so many fairs held at Brackenbury that the date of one of them might easily slip out of the memory:—on Candlemas for horses, on May Day for horses and cows, on St. James's and St. Matthew's Day for all kinds of cattle and goods; and at the latter farm-servants were hired.

"We'll go to the fair," said Fred; and to the fair they went.

Of course, they did not want to buy cattle, or goods in any commercial sense. They meant to buy gilt ginger-bread, lollipops, and things like that; but it was to stare about them in its pleasure part that they went to the fair. Besides the stalls full of cakes, sweeties, oranges, apples and pears, plums and cherries, toys, trinkets, gay crockeryware, gayer ribbons, and so on, there were swings, merry-go-rounds, great wheels that turned round with boats holding four a-piece inside; wax-works, a small wild beast show, with very big pictures outside, in which the animals were painted about four times the size of life; a six-legged calf, a two-

headed sheep, a learned pig, dancing dogs, an infant Hercules, a lady without hands who could take portraits by means of a pencil held between her teeth; a giant, a dwarf, posturers, bag-pipe players, hurdy-gurdyists with monkeys and white mice, a performer on the bells, who announced his performance as that given before the chief crowned heads of Europe; a conjurer, two bands besides those belonging to the shows, in front of which clowns played antics, and to which the public was invited to "Walk up! walk up!" a fire-king, otherwise a salamander, who announced that "like that famous bird, the cassowary," he could swallow burning coals; a happy family, Punch-and-Judy, a Cheap-Jack, a Silly-Billy, a strong man, tight-rope dancers, walkers on stilts, horse-riders, gipsy fortune-tellers, and I don't know what besides.

A good deal of the fair could be enjoyed for nothing; sights and sounds that had to be paid for were not extravagantly priced; both the boys had money, and Dick, who happened to be the richer of the two, was always ready to stand treat, or, as Shum delicately phrased it, "advance the needful," when his companion expressed his approval of such or such a show, but hinted a doubt as to whether they could afford it.

It was after one of the brief performances in the circus, which had made Dick believe the clown to be the most humorous man in existence, and the little girl in the white muslin and blue sash, who jumped through the paper in the hoop and then came down on her pony and rode him round the ring on one toe at full leaning-inwards circus gallop, to be the most beautiful and fearless maiden outside a story-book;—it was then, I say, they suddenly awoke to a sense of their position.

Back for school they started; up Castle Hill they raced; to the right; down to the right again; but when they reached the great blue gates, by the side gate of which the boys went in and out, the clock of the nearest church began to strike eight.

"I say, young un," asked Shum, hurriedly, "what was the name of that lady who spoke to you?"

"Miss Knight," answered Dick. "She knows my mamma."

"Oh, well then," whispered Shum, "we must say that she made us stop to tea."

But Dick's mamma and papa both had taught him that he had

better tear out his tongue than tell a lie; so he determined he would say nothing of the kind.

When Dick and Fred slipped into the schoolroom, the boys had put away their books, and were waiting for the word of command to file out.

"Shum," sharply asked Miss Quinciner, who was the teacher in charge, "how is it that you are so late?"

"Oh, if you please, ma'am," answered Fred, "little Abbot met a lady his mamma knows, Miss Knight, down by the river, and she was kind enough to ask us to tea."

He said this glibly enough, but there was something in his tone which excited Miss Quinciner's suspicion.

"*Did* you meet Miss Knight, Abbot?" she asked, abruptly.

"Yes, ma'am," answered Dick.

"And have you been to tea at her house?" tartly inquired Miss Quinciner.

"No," replied Dick.

"Then where *have* you been?"

Dick had learnt not only that it was wicked to tell a lie, but that it was mean to tell tales, and so without intending to be untruthful by his emphasis, he answered,—"*I* went to the fair, ma'am."

VI.

FRED SHUM, finding that Dick was inclined to screen him, was mean enough to make use of his "*I* went to the fair," so as to throw all the blame of the truancy on him.

Shum made out that having missed Dick, he had spent a great deal of time in hunting about in the town for him, and that having at last found him at the fair, he had at once hurried him back to school, and had invented the story about the invitation to tea to screen the little fellow. This sham-generous account of the affair would not hold water, however; and when Miss Lamblion discovered exactly how matters stood, she flamed out in righteous wrath. Had not his friends begged hard for him, and had he not been going to leave at the end of the half anyhow, she would have expelled Shum at once,—and expulsion from Miss Lamblion's was thought no joke. Dr. Birch, at any rate, would not have received a boy whom she had turned out of her fold.

When Miss Knight called to invite Dick to tea on the following Wednesday, she was told that, as a matter of formal punishment, he could not be allowed to accept the invitation; but the account of his delinquencies which Miss Lamblion gave to Miss Knight, and which Miss Knight wrote home to his mother, did not greatly disquiet Mrs. Abbott.

Dick became a favourite at school. Pretty Miss Carter made more of a pet of him than ever, whilst she had not a word, beyond what school business made necessary, to say to Fred Shum, who was despised by every one at Miss Lamblion's, from the principal down to the boy who cleaned the knives and shoes.

Dick soon had leave to spend a half-holiday at Miss Knight's, and since that good lady had some doubts as to her ability to entertain, unaided, a young gentleman who could capture big fish by means of an angling machine, she obtained permission for Dick to bring with him any friend he liked, so that the boys might amuse one onother.

Of course, Dick chose his chum, Percy.

"Oh, this is prime, Bantam!" said Percy, as the two little fellows trotted through the town on their way to their entertainer's, who had a snug old house in a big garden on the London Road.

They passed the farm on the left, from whose yard turkeys looked down in savage majesty, and fiercely gobbled wrath,—anger which Percy increased by derisive gestures and pelting them with little pebbles. Sometimes they seemed inclined to swoop down like eagles on their aggravator; but, one after another, the cocks, ruffling their feathers, gave an indignant hum, and strutted off, followed by their hens.

A little farther on, upon the right, the boys came to the stone steps which led through a thick hedge, thickly powdered by the passing coaches, waggons, gigs, and so on, into the trim, without being prim, green-shaded grounds, nearly in the middle of which stood Miss Knight's cosy, creeper-covered house. She looked more like a dove than ever, as she came across the grass-plat, without a bonnet, to coo them a welcome. Her two women-servants, ancient mob-capped maidens like herself, as they lingered in the hall, gently excited by the arrival of male guests, even though only little boys, looked like doves also, but of a somewhat coarser build, and darker, not dingier, hue.

Miss Knight had no experience in the entertainment of small boys, but, trusting to the light of nature, she had arrived at the conclusion that the best way to please her little guests would be to give them plenty to eat and drink (with shy hints, of which she would feel half ashamed, not to take too much), and then to let them have as much liberty as possible to entertain one another by themselves.

Accordingly she took the little fellows into her pretty "summer parlour," as dainty as a robin's nest, and gave them some sweet rice-cake and cowslip wine, both, from their fitness to her sweet neatness, evidently of her own making; and then she sent them out to amuse themselves in her gardens.

As to her kitchen-garden, which she rightly supposed would be the more attractive, she could scarcely force herself to give even the most stammeringly faint hints about not taking too much, for their own good, of the fruit; but the little boys were not vulgar little pigs, and so let us hope even these hints were, in the main, unnecessary; standing in dread, however, of her grumpy, non-Quaker John, gardener and coachman, she became emphatic in her instructions as to what beds the boys were not to trample on, what trees and bushes they were not to touch.

But there was a good deal of fruit which the boys were allowed to gather: codlins, pearmains, and pippins, gooseberries and currants, cherries, pears, plums, damsons, greengages; and even of John's jealously-guarded figs, filberts, grapes, melons, mulberries, and peaches, and nectarines,—the last two of which hung thick on the warm, red, lichened walls, that looked almost as ripe and downy,—the little boys got quite as much as was good for them.

Grumpy John, who was sowing cabbages, cauliflowers, and lettuce, planting strawberry runners, netting trees and bushes, and so on, scowled at the intruders on his domain when they happened to cross his path; but it was easy to give him a wide berth; indeed, to get quite out of eyeshot of him,—the garden was so large, and so full of standards, espaliers, sticked peas, and other groves of vegetables. John might be grumpy, but he certainly was a good gardener. Besides fruit and peas, cabbage, cauliflowers, and lettuce, he had made his mistress's place a cornucopia of all kinds of beans, and salad, artichokes, beet, carrots, turnips, cucumbers, celery, leeks, onions, potatoes, shalots, spinach, pur-

slain,—indeed, all the year round Miss Knight had every vegetable in season. Her asparagus, her rhubarb, and her vegetable marrows defied all rivalry, and John claimed to be the introducer of a new variety of turnip radish.

Such an amount of green food for a household of four, at first sight seemed absurd, but, venturing to turn a deaf ear for once to John, who would have liked to farm the garden for his own profit, Miss Knight managed to get rid of her surplus produce in gifts to rich and poor; and John took his revenge by being almost as tyrannical in the garden as if his contract for its yield had been accepted.

Miss Knight had a poultry yard, tenanted with similar disproportion to her personal needs, and rather oddly, for such a peace-loving old lady, amongst her fowls she kept game-fowls. Whilst the boys were looking about in the yard, a black-breasted red cock attacked them with the greatest rancour and persistency; pecking their flesh through their clothes. Real wounds the furious bird inflicted with his prodding bill. Had either little boy been alone I think he would not have faced the cock so long as he did, but shame for a time kept them from turning tail. The circumstances under which they did so at last were very mortifying. The women servants had come out to see what was the matter, and John had strolled up with a sulky grin, and taking the cock under his arm, had bidden the boys be off, if they did not wish to have their eyes pecked out.

By the time the servants had darned the rents in their tunics and trousers, tea was ready, and that meal was so delicious that our young heroes almost forgot their discomfiture. It was not pleasant, however, to be condoled with on it by Miss Knight, in a tone thoroughly kindly, but still tinged with a kind of proud astonishment that her by no means big bird should have been able to put to flight two good-sized little boys.

After tea Miss Knight again felt somewhat at a loss how to entertain her guests. She took them through her greenhouse; she showed them her stuffed humming-birds, sent over from America by her planter cousin; she said it was very sad that white men should force black men to work for them with the whip, but that she believed her cousin was a very kind master, and that she had heard from him that negroes were very lazy; she hoped that Dick

and Percy would not be lazy at Miss Lamblion's; she showed them a sampler she had worked at school; before the fruit came in she let them taste her apricot jam; out of a drawer smelling of Tonka beans she brought the miniature of a little boy, her favourite brother,—a little boy of sixty or seventy years before, so funnily dressed, and looking so solemn, that Dick and Percy had hard work to keep from laughing; she exhibited some bottles, ornamented with chintz, and filled with sand; she brought out an ancient *hortus siccus*, containing the fruits, or rather a few of the leaves, of the botanical studies of her youth; she hunted up a grotto, made of cork and cinders; she set them to find places in an Atlas; she wound up her clock for their entertainment some hours before its time; she told them how to make British wines; she instructed them in the best way of fattening fowls and choosing friends; she gave them a recipe for taking out ironmould, and another for making lip-salve. Of the boys' scholastic attainments, owing to the school they were at, Miss Knight seemed to have for the most part a very reverential opinion, and these, therefore, she did not attempt to test, save in setting them to find out places in the Atlas, in order to discover whether their mistress's devotion to classical studies had led her to let them neglect the utilities of an English education; but the good old lady made a great many enquiries as to the books they read out of school, and liberally offered to lend them any books they liked out of her little library of Quaker literature. In short Miss Knight laid herself out to please her guests in every way she could think of; but she could not help perceiving that her success was not equal to her desire and endeavour.

At last she thought of taking her cook, Tryphena, into her councils; and Tryphena, having further consulted her slightly younger sister, Tryphosa, the housemaid, it was decided that a swing should be put up for the boys in the garden. On this the grave servants swung the merry boys, and the merry boys swung the grave servants, one by one (the other servant assisting), until the servants' gravity was gone, and they, as well as the boys, laughed so merrily that gentle Miss Knight, although she was too hospitable to interfere, began to doubt whether her premises' reputation for decorum might not be compromised.

Fruit, and a light supper which ever-hungry boys' appetites

managed to make heavy, brought the half-holiday, which had hung fire at times, to a pleasant close.

Neither Dick nor Percy approved at first of having Tryphosa told off as their escort to see them back to school, instead of their being allowed to march back through the town by themselves, like the little men they thought themselves; but she proved herself so pleasant a companion on the road that they contented themselves with saying, when they got inside the blue gates, "We needn't tell that anyone saw us home unless we're asked."

VII.

MISS LAMBLION'S birthday fell in the middle of August, and this was always kept as a holiday. After an early breakfast, at which the birthday gift subscribed for by the boys, and the others from the resident teachers, visiting masters (who were invited to share in the day's festivities), and servants, had been presented to Miss Lamblion, she took her pupils and staff, in a curious variety of hired vehicles, out for a picnic in one or other of the many pretty sylvan spots which surround Brackenbury.

The eventful day had come. The boys' writing-desk had been presented, which Miss Lamblion did not value any the less because she was already the possessor of some half-dozen received from former generations of pupils; the books, the trinkets, the muffetees, &c., from professors, governesses, and kitchen retainers had been duly acknowledged; the early breakfast had been pecked at, rather than eaten; the miscellaneous vehicles had arrived, escorted by a few grinning adults, and a crowd of town boys, ready to jeer or cheer at a moment's notice; and at last the order to embark was given.

As a rule, the big boys monopolised the outside seats, but there happening to be room for them, Dick and Percy found themselves, to their delight, on the top of a kind of omnibus. Crack went the whips, round went the wheels, off rolled and rattled the cortege. The town boys hurrahed, and then, as if in envy because they were not going for a country treat, they howled and pelted the holiday-makers with pebbles, Miss Lamblion's boys replying with a sharp fire from their pea-shooters, which discomfited the plebeians—no one being more pleased and proud than Miss Lamb-

lion when they were driven off; but Miss Quinciner thought pea-shooting very "ungenteel."

The thistledown floating about was not lighter than the hearts of the boys; the broods of young goldfinches were not merrier than they, when they got into "real country."

By-and-by they came upon a Roman road paved with flints. They drove through an old-fashioned town, past a big church with chalk pillars, and over a wide market-place, on which, every St. Thomas's Day, two bulls used to be baited beneath the windows of the old wood-and-plaster market-house. They passed the cracked, moss-grown stocks, and the lichened old hospital, and then a halt was called, and an encampment made in the Royal Forest.

After an early breakfast, an early luncheon was necessary. The former was almost a sham, but the latter was a very substantial reality. As soon as the hampers were unpacked, the whole party fell to very heartily on sandwiches, plum-cake and seed-cake, bread and cheese, buns, sausage-rolls, biscuits, jam-tarts, cheese-cakes, &c. A splendid tiffin of crumbs was left for the birds.

This first forest meal over, everyone was free to wander whither, and stay where, he or she liked, until dinner was ready.

Not far off there was a "Cæsar's camp," and in another direction the remains of an old Roman-British city, with beam-trees growing on its ruined walls of stone and flint. And then there was the glorious forest, in which most preferred to roam about, play at cricket, bathe, or otherwise amuse themselves.

Miss Quinciner, thinking it due to her professional character, proposed a visit to "one or other of the interesting relics of antiquity, or to the still-extant historical castle," and openly asked Mr. Reynolds, the young drawing-master, to come with her to make sketches. But Mr. Reynolds begged to have himself excused. Spitefnl people said that Miss Quinciner wished Mr. Reynolds to make, not sketches for or with her, but love to her.

Of Miss Lamblion's "professors," the only ones who had been able to accept her birthday invitation on this occasion were Mr. Reynolds and M. d'Enflure (known in the school as *Mossoo*) the snuffy middle-aged bachelor French master, who believed that every English woman was in love with him, and that he had a more intimate acquaintance with the English language

and literature than any Englishman. It was said that he had even presumed to propose marriage, in the most condescending manner, to Miss Lamblion, and that she had boxed his ears soundly for his pains. Mr. Reynolds and Mr. d'Enflure hated one another with all their hearts. The Frenchman would pretend to find flaws in the Englishman's English, and remark—

"It is droll; behold, I know better de pure eedome of your speech dan you same. Is it not, Mr. Rainold?"

One day the French master said to the drawing master—

"Probably, my dear, you ave not read de noble vurk of de gr-r-and Bacon—your compatriote, comprehend you?"

Whereupon the drawing-master, hastily whisking off some snuff which the French master had dropped on a pupil's drawing-paper, had angrily answered that he was acquainted with the nasty works of a great pig, who was no countryman of his, he was thankful to say.

One reason why Mr. Reynolds and M. d'Enflure detested each other was because they were both very fond of Miss Carter.

On this day of the picnic they devoted themselves to her, although she cared for neither, or rather, disliked both as energetically as it was possible for a good-natured girl to do.

Then, again, Miss Quinciner chose to devote herself to Mr. Reynolds, who did not care a rap for her, so that as uncomfortable a party of four as it is almost possible to imagine was brought together throughout the day, except when Miss Carter managed to break away and join Miss Lamblion (who put off all starch on her birthdays) in her frolics with the boys.

Dick and Percy were of those who made the forest their playground, and in it they wandered, making believe that they were Robin Hood and Little John, Friar Tuck and Maid Marian, and all kinds of characters besides.

There were deer in the forest—a great many more than at White Ladies—red and roe, as well as fallow. Hares and rabbits were floundering and scampering about with flopping, or sitting at attention with pricked-up, ears; a big domestic cat, run wild, looking fierce enough to be a wild cat, was prowling about like a small tiger; a weasel stopped and faced the boys, as if inclined to fly at their throats; squirrels scampered up trees, and sat chattering and nut-cracking on the branches.

The little wanderers came to great reedy, rushy ponds, haunted by wild ducks, teal, lapwings, snipes, moorhens, coots, dabchicks, and water-rats. In one a little, lanky otter was writhing its way under water. Beside another two or three herons were standing, which rose and flew away, with their long legs streaming behind them, when the little boys shouted.

In these big ponds they saw silvery air-bubbles coming up in strings, little fish darting about in shoals, and bigger fish floating motionlesss in sulky solitude, except when they leapt at the swarm of glittering flies buzzing over the bright water, and then fell back into it with a near and eye-refreshing splash.

Little boys, as a rule, do not care for flowers as little girls do, but even our little boys could not help admiring the white, yellow, pink, purple, blue, rosy-red, flesh coloured, lilac blossom of the water-weeds with which the ponds were fringed, bristled and paved. And in drier places in the forest there was an abundance of wild flowers: ling, mallows, vetches, furze, mint, mullein, red nettles, golden rod, blue bells, blue bottles, thistles, goldylocks, hawkbit, scabiouses, bryony, campion, cinque foil, meliot, clover, shoes and stockings, and a host besides.

Butterflies as beautiful were fluttering in the air; brimstones, saffrons, clouded sulphurs, garden whites, green-veined whites, wood whites, marbled-whites, wood arguses, meadow-browns, heaths, blues, painted ladies, red admirals, peacocks, tortoise-shells, fritillaries, hair-streaks, and skippers.

It seemed as if the butterflies as well as the schoolboys had come out for a picnic, and many a chase did our little friends give their smaller fellow-picnicers—ungratefully, as it seems to me, and unsuccessfully, I am happy to add.

The boys saw a snake curled up in the sunshine, and as they were looking at it, wondering whether or not it was a viper, it uncurled itself and wriggled off. Percy thought Dick quite a hero because he caught a blind-worm by the tail, but Dick's papa had told him that it was all nonsense about blind-worms being venomous, and since Dick did not tell Percy this, he certainly obtained praise under false pretences. After all, he did not keep his blind-worm. It made its escape by snapping off its tail.

Next the two boys got on a dusty donkey, but that soon sent them flying over its head, and trotted off, shaking its ears, and

slyly looking round. They wondered at fairy rings, and caught a frog, and had a fruitless chase after a field-mouse. They found a

"Miss Lamblion called Miss Carter to a seat at her right hand."

hedgehog sunning himself in a dry ditch, but he, too, managed to get away. Coveys of partridges rose up with a whirr from the dry

grass, and single pheasants with a scream and a fluster from the underwood almost at the feet of our little friends. They saw a pair of kingfishers zigzagging up and down a little half-shaded stream, flashing like jewels when they crossed the sunbeams. The mischievous youngsters flung up stones to start the wood-pigeons cooing on the great smooth-boled beeches, whose glassy leaves had not yet begun to turn yellow. For a rest the boys lay down at the foot of some fir-trees, and almost fell asleep as they listened to the sea-like murmur in the branches. The croak of a raven, staggering off from the top of a big oak as if he were drunk and could not keep his wings, awoke the nodders, and next a flock of rooks flew cawing overhead, shiny black blots on the blue and white sky, and then a woodpecker ran up a tree like a parrot.

The youngsters had greatly enjoyed their ramble, but as it had given them a very good appetite, they were not sorry when they heard the bugle-call to dinner tantara-ing over the forest.

The drivers of the miscellaneous vehicles, stabled at the nearest inn, were supplied with the solid portion of their day's refreshments by Miss Lamblion, and took it in the open air; but, to say nothing of modest good manners, other reasons (consumption of liquids included) led them to make their picnic out of sight of the school party. The best horn-player, however, among them—at any rate, the longest winded—was always told off to summon the straggling schoolboys to their meals.

When Dick and Percy reached the place of rendezvous, the table-cloths were ready-laid upon the grass, with stones, instead of salt-cellars, at the corners, to keep the wind from ruffling them. The dinner was cold, but plentiful: beef-steak pies, veal-pies, pigeon-pies, a round of boiled beef, ham and roast fowls, apple-pasties, gooseberry, currant, cherry and damson pie. Everybody seemed to relish it except poor persecuted Miss Carter, of whom, to Miss Quinciner's disgust, Mr. Reynolds and M. d'Enflure persisted in making a sandwich; fluttering about her, one on each side, when she helped in carrying round the plates; and sitting down by her, one on each side, when she tried to get some dinner for herself.

At last Miss Lamblion took pity on her, and called her to a seat at her right hand, with our little friends for protectors on the other side.

Dinner over, the boys scattered as before, with orders to reassemble at an early tea.

But when the bugle sounded for it, Dick and Percy were missing.

VIII.

SEARCH was made, shouts rang through the woods, but nothing could be seen or heard of Dick and Percy; and accordingly Miss Lamblion had to start for home without them. All along the road back she made inquiries, but could get no information. For that night she was obliged to content herself with offering liberal rewards for the recovery of the little lads. For her, at any rate, her birthday was completely spoiled. When she reached the school-house, she was as agitated as a hen that has lost her foster ducklings. As for Mrs. Dow, who had prefered a quiet day by herself to being present at the picnic, when she heard that her little pets were missing, she fairly burst out crying.

This is how it was.

Percy and Dick had lost themselves. They had managed to put a good bit of ground between them and their camp in their afternoon rambles, before they thought of going back, and when they did turn, in order to be in time for tea, they in fact struck off in a direction which carried them at every step farther and farther from the place of rendezvous.

They wandered about until the sun went down, the twilight faded, and more and more stars came out, brighter and brighter in the clear sky. It seemed very dreary to the frightened little boys, as they stumbled along, listening to the hooting of the ghostly owls, and to other eerie night-noises of which they could make nothing.

At last they were so tired that they were obliged to lie down; but, although the day before had been warm, the night, after twelve, turned cold, and they were soon glad to get up again. So they went on, lying down and getting up again, until at last, nestling back to back in a hollow filled by dry dead leaves heaped on white sand, they did manage to get a nap for an hour or so: though a wood-lark, poised in the air above them, was singing merrily, as, off and on, throughout their night wanderings, they had heard his fellows singing.

About five the rising sun awoke our little boys. Oh, how they wished themselves in their dormitory at school, just gone to bed for the night. Then, to both at the same time, the thought occurred that, where they were, they need not get up until they liked; but then the thought of where they were banished sleep, and without sleep they knew they could not get any comfort there, tired though they were. So up they got, uncomfortable from top to toe. They gaped and shivered, and felt as if some one had shoved a great handful of hairs down the back of each.

On the day after her birthday Miss Lamblion excused her boys from before-breakfast school; but how gladly would Dick and Percy have been going into it, on condition of getting a refreshing wash in the school lavatory beforehand, and a comfortable breakfast in the dining-hall afterwards. Their legs ached, their feet were sore and swollen: it may not seem a very heavy grievance, but even the sight of their unblacked shoes made them miserable. They thought of Peter, Miss Lamblion's boy-of-all-work, just then busy with his boot and shoe-polishing, and almost wished that they could change places with him.

On they went, along the narrow, winding track to which, not their own wit, but the thick brushwood on each side had kept them during the night. It led them into a little grassy lane, not much wider than a bridle-path, and this again led them to a bit of open, rushy waste in the midst of the forest.

On this gipsies were encamped, their cart-tilt tents sprawled here and there, more like mole-hill mounds than mansions. Some of the carts had their shafts in the air, others on the ground; and from under these gipsy boys were crawling out after their night's repose.

The camp had begun to stir. Some of the dogs were yelling in anticipation of a move, whilst others, thinking they had done enough barking during the night, were making up for their vigilance then, with snoring nozzles laid on their fore-paws.

Two wood-fires had been lighted, and over them were slung two black-pots from wooden tripods. Lounging about the fires, crawling out of the tents, or from under the carts, or "busying" themselves in a very leisurely style here and there about the camp, were a number of men, women, and children, almost all black-haired and more or less dark-skinned, and all black-eyed. Most of

the old women were witch-like hags, with nutcracker chin and nose, dressed in mangy, big beaver bonnets, and faded, stained, ragged red cloaks; but some of the matrons and grown-up maidens were handsome, pearly-toothed women, with gaily-patterned kerchiefs on their heads, strings of blue and amber-coloured beads round their necks, and on their backs scarlet mantles, as smart and as whole as a soldier's coat in spring. The tall, lean, lithe, sinewy men and hobbledehoys wore felt slouched hats, coachman or costermonger-like "belchers," and long corduroy or velveteen waistcoats, with bone or mother-of-pearl buttons and fustian sleeves, and corduroy trousers very baggy behind, and very tight from the knee downwards. Some of them wore one spur a-piece; others cracked brass-ringed carters' whips. The young children seemed to have been clad "anyhow"—off scarecrows and out of ditches. The very young ones were not clad at all, but rolled about in the sunshine as naked as little niggers, and scarcely less coffee-coloured. There were one or two tinkers' barrows at rest in the encampment. One of the men, using a stone for his anvil, was hammering away at a donkey-shoe. Besides the little light carts to which the dusty asses dragging about their heavy clogs were soon to be harnessed, there were larger vehicles, one laden with rough basket-work, horn spoons, clothes-props, rush and heather brooms, etc.; and the other with coarse red and brown and yellow pans and dishes, and table and dresser crockery more gaudy than the women's kerchiefs. The shaggy little cart-horses that would have to draw these were stumbling about in hobbles; and a little string of smarter-looking horseflesh had been got ready for a fair, with straw-plaited manes and tails.

The slung pots began to send forth a most sweet-smelling savour; but what *was* in them I cannot of course, undertake to say. Since, however, gipses snap their fingers at "close time," and all other Game Law prohibitions—do not care, indeed, for any laws except those of their own making—I will tell you what gipsies might have feasted on, without paying a penny, in such a place at that time of the year—pike, poultry, duck, goose, hares, leverets, moorgame, pigeons, plovers, rabbits, turkeys, wild fowl, partridges, pheasants, fawn venison, and even buck, lamb, mutton, veal, beans, carrots, cauliflowers, celery, cucumbers, leeks, lettuces, mushrooms, onions, peas, potatoes, radishes, shalots, spinach, turnips, red cabbage,

tomatoes, and sundry other things. With the forest to poach in, and gardens, farmyards, and orchards on its outskirts to levy con-

"The gipsies shouted to them to come on."

tributions upon, it would have been easy, for a time, for the gipsies to make varied daily selections from this ample bill of fare, and

then to have finished off with a dessert of apples, pears, plums, greengages, damsons, cherries, gooseberries, and currants.

Whatever were the mixtures in the pots, they smelt very nice, and our little friends were very hungry; therefore, when the gipsies sighted them, and shouted to them to come on, they did not feel so inclined to run away as they would have done if they had had no hope of getting a good breakfast by obeying the summons cheerfully.

The little lads told their story, and asked the way into the Brackenbury Road.

Now, if the gipsies had known anything of the reward which Miss Lamblion had offered for the recovery of the boys, they would, doubtless, at any risk, have sent one or more of the tribe to Brackenbury with them, in order to obtain it.

And if they had happened to be travelling securely Brackenbury-wards, they would, for a similar reason, have taken the boys with them on spec. But just then it happened not to be convenient for them to strike into the great thoroughfare which ran through Brackenbury, either up or down, within a considerable distance of that town.

Accordingly they contented themselves with winking at one another, bidding the boys sit down and take pot-luck, and promising them that by-and-by they should be put into the right road.

The boys greatly relished their pot-luck. When they had finished a very liberal allowance of the steaming soup, stew, hotch-potch, or whatever it should be called, one of the good-looking matrons took them under her motherly care, and saying that they must still be tired, bade them lie down in her tent and get a rest.

This they did, and although the blanket on which they stretched themselves was almost as black as Miss Lamblion's sheets were lily-white, they fell sound asleep.

When they awoke, or rather were aroused from their refreshing slumber, they found that the tent had been taken from over their heads, and packed, with all its little furniture, except the blanket on which they lay, into a donkey cart, beside which stood the gipsy-woman and a strapping gipsy wench, both grinning.

All the rest of the camp, its equipages and its occupants, quadruped and biped, had vanished. The traces of four or five camp-fires, holes in the ground into which stakes and pegs had been

thrust and a greasy litter of gnawn bones and so on, were all that would soon be left to show that the gipsies had ever encamped there. The blanket was thrown into the cart, and the boys were bidden to jump in after it; and then along the rutted, shady lane the cart creaked and pitched and rolled, leaving the bit of waste in the opposite direction to that from which the boys had come upon it. On each side of the cart walked a gipsy-woman, benevolently grinning.

When they had gone about a quarter of a mile the elder woman took the donkey by the head-stall and led him off the track behind a clump of trees. There she bade the boys jump out, telling them she would take them by a short cut on foot into the Brackenbury road.

She laid hold of Dick's hand, and the younger woman, who had taken a bundle out of the cart, of Percy's. When they had reached a specially lonely densely-wooded hollow in the forest, the gipsies stopped and bade the boys strip and put on the things in the bundle—some of the gipsy children's beggars' clothes. The little fellows began to cry, and, frightened though they were, stamped on the ground, and angrily declared that they would never put on such filthy rags.

"You can do as you like about that, young gentlemen," said the gipsy wench, flinging down the bundle. "Here they are for ye."

And then the two women stripped the two boys of everything they had on them—including even their few pence and their pocket-knives—and took their departure, still grinning as if they were the kindest of creatures. The boys had kicked and writhed and howled, but it had not affected the big, strong-armed women's temper in the least. They had only told the youngsters that it was no use—that they had better hold their row to save their breath. It was a long time before the little fellows could prevail upon themselves to put on the loathsome rags, but at last their pride had to give in. If they were to find their way back to civilisation at all, they could scarcely go naked. So they dressed, and resumed their wanderings.

"Robinson Crusoe and Man Friday, Bantam," said Percy; but he did not think much of his joke, and Dick could not see anything in it.

Late in the afternoon—it was almost evening, indeed—they

came into a cross-country road, which soon led them into a high road, in which they found an old milestone, with

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cut on it.

Whether this was the Brackenbury road or not, they could not tell. They fancied not, because, although a high road, it was so little frequented, and the mile "stones" they were familiar with on the Brackenbury road were metal ones. Even if it were their road, they must be eight miles from their destination, since Breckenbury was thirty-seven miles from London. Besides, which way must they turn? There was no one passing, and they were quite bewildered by their wanderings.

They turned to the left, and read on the next milestone—

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Down by it they sat dolefully, waiting for some one to come by. Presently, round the corner of a lane, came a horse and gig, driven by a portly gentleman in a blue coat and brass buttons, who, when he saw the boys running after him, shook his head and his whip, thinking they were little gipsy beggars. But after him sped the barefooted boys, calling out as clearly as their panting would let them, "Please—sir—is this the way—to Bracken—bury?"

He happened to turn round, and then Percy pushed after him faster than before, and shouted louder than ever, "Uncle—Uncle John—it's me—Percy—Percy Sharpe."

Uncle John—Mr. John Sharpe, a country doctor settled in one of the Forest villages, with a practice extending for a good many miles round it—pulled up in utter astonishment.

At the first inkling of the boys' story, he bade them get into the gig, adding, with a laugh, that, for the sake of his respectability, they had better hide under the apron; and then he urged his plump brown horse at a canter towards his home.

IX.

Mrs. John Sharpe stared greatly when our little ragamuffins crawled out of the gig, before she recognized her nephew and

even more when she had recognized him. However, she soon began to bustle about. Two tubs were filled with hot water in the scullery, and in these Dick and Percy were speedily splashing in a sea of soapsuds. Their beggars' rags, lifted with a pair of tongs, were thrown out into the backyard, and instantly burnt. One of the women-servants—Mrs. Sharpe having no children of her own—was sent out to borrow temporary clothing for the boys from a neighbour, whilst the man was sent off on horse-back to Brackenbury, to report at Miss Lamblion's that the little fellows had been found, and to bring them back some clothes of their own.

Cleansed and refreshed by their bath, which had, so to speak, washed the pain out of their aching limbs and blistered feet; delivered from the degradation of their filthy tatters, and once more clad in clean linen and decent clothes—clean and decent, but a size or two too big for them—the boys, who had tasted nothing since their breakfast with the gipsies, discovered that they were as hungry as hunters.

The cold remains of the dinner's fillet of veal and gooseberry pie were brought into the parlour in which the tea-tray was set, fresh lettuces were cut for salad, and a cucumber (although the boys needed no relishes to make them eat); new-laid eggs were boiled, and Mrs. Sharpe laughed at the rate at which she had to spread her thick slices of delicious home-made, whole-meal bread with golden fragrant butter, that had come in, veiled in vine leaves, from a forest farm that day; and at the youngsters' equal enjoyment of cup after cup of her good tea, thickened with luscious forest cream.

They were a long time over their meal, and then came a long chat about their adventures, and then they were shown up into an old fashioned bedroom, with an old-fashioned four-post bedstead, big enough for them to play at hide-and-seek in. The sheets were white as snow, and smelt of lavender; the down bed was a far more yielding couch than that of leaves and sand the night before; but they did not long lie awake to think of that or anything. They sank into the down and dreamless slumber, from which they did not open their eyes until late next morning; for, notwithstanding their refreshing bath, they were thoroughly tired.

In their room they found their clothes, shoes, etc., which the man-servant had brought over from Brackenbury after they had fallen asleep. When they had dressed themselves and gone down-

stairs, they found that Mr. and Mrs. Sharpe had breakfasted, but the cloth had been left on the table, and soon Mrs. Sharpe was sitting behind the aromatic coffee-pot, ready to repeat her labours of the night before, had not the fresh pile of buttered toast, served up piping hot, with the fresh bacon and eggs, saved her from the necessity of again cutting and buttering bread like a mower and bricklayer rolled into one doing piece work.

"Your uncle has gone out on his morning rounds, Percy," said Mrs. Sharpe, "and won't be home until dinner. After dinner, some time, he'll drive you into Brackenbury. He said that he thought it would not do you and your little friend any harm to have another day free from school."

Oh, joy for the little boys! although, nevertheless, they half wanted to get back to Brackenbury to figure as most adventurous heroes amongst their schoolmates. However, that pleasure was sure to come some time or other, so they might as well get the extra holiday in.

"We dine at two," Mrs. Sharpe continued, "so you can run about where you like till then, unless you want a bit of lunch,—only mind you don't lose yourselves again, my husband says. Perhaps you had better not go into the forest."

The boys had no wish to go into the forest again at present. They had had quite enough of that for one while.

The first place Dick and Percy went into was the surgery, in which were Mr. Sharpe's two apprentices, or articled pupils, as such young gentlemen are called now-a-days. They were still boys, but thought themselves men, because they wore stick-up collars, stocks, and tail coats. The tadpole drops its tail to become grown-up; but a tail-coat of some kind is the *toga virilis* of the British boy. These lads called one another "Mister."

"Mr. Green," said one of them, who was "getting up his Latin," to which he seemed to have been very recently introduced, whilst Mr. Green, in linen sleeves and long apron like a grocer's, was pounding away with a pestle and mortar,—"Mr. Green, what is *exercitus?*"

"Oh, supine in *um* or in *u*, or something of that kind. You'd better look it out, Mr. Brown," answered Mr. Green.

Miss Lamblion's young Latinists looked queerly at each other. At first they thought that the "young men" must be joking, but

when Dick found that they were not, he exclaimed, in somewhat scornful wonder, "Why, *exercitus* is a substantive of the fourth declension, masculine gender; *exercitus exercitûs*, an army, of an army. Nouns in *er* and *us* are masculine, but these are feminine —but that don't matter."

"Teach your grandmother to suck eggs, young un," retorted Mr. Brown, who had great faith in the, if not ripe, yet probably more or less rapidly ripening, scholarship of Mr. Green.

"Teach your grandmother to suck eggs, young 'un."

He was more savage. "Much you know about it, Hop-o'-my-thumb," he answered. "You want to cut a bounce, do you? As I hadn't got my Latin grammar off by heart long before you

were born! If it is a noun, the genitive ends in—*utis*, *exercitus*, *exercitutis*, like *virtus*."

"Why *virtus* is a noun of the third declension, feminine gender," shouted Dick, in triumphant contempt. "Nouns increasing long in the genitive, as *virtus*, *virtutis*, are feminine."

Mr. Brown, having found by reference to his grammar that Dick had quoted this rule correctly, and by reference to his dictionary that Dick was right, too, about the declension and gender of *exercitus*, was somewhat staggered, and began to fear that past assistance in his classical studies which he had received from his chum might possibly not be quite so valuable as he had previously supposed it. But Mr. Green loftily remarked that it was all very fine for idle little monkeys of boys to come poking themselves into places where gentlemen were studying their profession, spouting like poll parrots the last little bit of Latin grammar they had learnt before the gipsies stripped them and put them to bed, just as if they'd been poor little babies that couldn't run alone.

"Here's some real useful Latin," Mr. Green, taking up a prescription, called out suddenly to Dick—"the kind of Latin we professional men use in the profession—not the kind of baby Latin you learn in your school. Shows what kind of Latin *that* must be, when women can teach it! Here, come and see if you can read this, Mr. Whipper Snapper Wiseacre!"

Of course, the prescription floored Dick. Even if the Latin had not been abbreviated, he could not have construed it, and Mr. Green enjoyed a cheap triumph.

"Oh, then, there *is something* you don't know, is there?" he sneered. "Do you know what *these* mean?" he added, pointing to the ℈ ʒ ℥.

Now, though Dick, thanks to Miss Primer, was pretty well on with his Latin, he was not so with his arithmetic. He had not got into weights and measures yet. So, feeling rather sheepish, he could only say, "This one looks like a comical capital E. turned backwards, and this is like some kind of a 3, and this other one like a 3 with a *z* on the top of it."

Magnanimous Mr. Green roared with delight that the exposure of his ignorance had been so avenged. *Here* was the clever little boy who had laughed at his Latin!

"So it is," cried Dick, losing his temper. "Like a monkey on hurdy-gurdy man."

"You'd do well for the monkey—you look so spiteful, little un," remarked the witty Mr. Green.

While Dick was trying hard to make up a sarcastic repartee—he did not know whether they did any grinding in the surgery, and even if they did, it seemed to him that it would be a tame retort, after such an insult, to say merely that Green would do for the hurdy-gurdy man—whilst, then, Dick was trying to pump up scalding wit, Percy looked over his shoulder.

Now though Percy was not so far on in his Latin grammar as Dick, he had got into weights and measures; and as soon as he saw the mysterious signs, he cried out, "Why, it's only apothecaries' weight—twenty grains one scruple, three scruples one dram, eight drams one ounce, twelve ounces one pound—and here's the figures," he went on, "and the names of the things down short like you've got 'em on the drawers and the bottles. Why, any fool, if he was only quite sure which was the right stuff to take, and how much of it, and what to do with it afterwards, could make up physic. It don't want much Latin for that."

Under cover of which speech the little boys marched out of the surgery, if not with all the honours of war, at any rate, having given quite as good as they had got.

At dinner, Mr. Sharpe noticing that Mr. Green looked very scornfully at the little boys, inquired the cause; whereupon Mr. Brown blurted it out. In consequence of his supposed superior scholarship, Mr. Green had hitherto somewhat "sat upon" his companion, and, the said superiority having turned out to be a sham, Mr. Brown was glad to avail himself of an opportunity to display his independence in public.

Mr. Sharpe had a good laugh at his pupil, and Mr. Green looked very black at Mr. Brown; but soon Mr. Brown, as well as Mr. Green, looked very black at their master.

As Percy and Dick were leaving the room after dinner, in company with the apprentices, Mr. Sharpe, who was going to smoke a cigar before he drove our little friends into Brackenbury, addressing the four collectively, remarked, "Now mind, you boys, don't get quarrelling again."

After that Messrs. Green and Brown would not deign to take

the slightest notice of Dick and his friend. They stalked in a sulky state into the surgery, to pursue the study of their profession, or to settle their private differences, whilst Dick and Percy ran, as they had been bidden, into the garden, where they took a walking and clambering-about dessert, and picked themselves, by Mrs. Sharpe's orders, a basketful of apples to take back to school. It was a big basket, but Mr. Sharpe's gig was big also, and had plenty of room for it and him and the boys. They had not to hide under the apron this time.

The pupils were peeping out of the surgery window to witness the start, but when they saw that the little boys had noticed them, they pulled up their collars, and, looking loftily unconscious, pretended to be deep-plunged in the study of their profession.

After a pleasant ride the gig rolled into Brackenbury. As it passed through Minster Street, where the flat goldfish was spinning and sparkling just as usual—just as if our little friends had had no startling adventures since they saw it last—pleasant-faced Mrs. Buskitt, who was standing at the door of the tackle-shop, caught sight of them.

She had heard that they were lost, but had not heard of their recovery. Out into the road she ran with her good-natured congratulations.

A still warmer welcome awaited the gig.

It pulled up in front of the school-house some ten minutes before afternoon business should have ended, but having been seen from the school-room window, it sent discipline to the winds. A rush was made to the front door, scandalised Miss Quinciner alone being left behind. Miss Lamblion herself led the van, and Miss Carter brought up the rear; whilst down from the workroom trotted Mrs. Dow, and up from the kitchen the grinning, gaping servants.

Even shoe-oppressed Peter did not seem to grudge the return of the two pair which he would once more have to black.

X.

You can fancy how greedily, not only their schoolmates, but their governesses and the other grown-up inmates of the house, listened to the little boys' narrative of their adventures. Fred

Shum, indeed, hinted that they had made up a good bit of it, and that, even if they had not, there was nothing so very wonderful,

"Up from the kitchen came the grinning, gaping servants."

after all, in what happened to them; but no one at Miss Lamblion's minded much what Fred Shum said now. Perhaps some of the

other big chaps were rather jealous of the fuss which was made with the little fellows, but they were propitiated by the apples, which were dispensed with impartial liberality.

Miss Lamblion wrote a long account of the whole affair to Mr. and Mrs. Abbott, and, to prove, as it were, that he really had come back to school, Dick had to write home also—a circumstance which almost made him wish he had never had his adventures. He was looking forward to talking about them at home at Michaelmas to his mamma and papa, his sisters, Miss Primer, the servants, the postman, the parish clerk, and the other people in the village; but letter-writing, Dick thought a tremendous bore—at any rate when he had to bother about the writing, and not blotting, and spelling, and grammar, and proper words.

Of the home letters sent to Dick after his brief sojourn with the gipsies, I will give those he received from his sisters:—

"THE VICARAGE, FOXEARTH,
August 22nd, 18—.

"MY DEAR RICHARD,—Your letter was very short, and Miss Primer thinks you have not improved in writing. You have not made any mistakes in spelling, but I suppose you have to make rough copies of your letters. Or do your governesses compose them for you, and then you copy them, just as if you were writing a copy in your copy-book? If so, I am sure you could not have minded your copy, or else the governess who set it must write a very bad hand, and I do not think that is likely.

"We should have been very sad and frightened if we had heard of your having been stolen by the gipsies before we had heard of your being brought back to school by kind Mr. Sharpe.

"As it is, if it had not been for Miss Lamblion's letter, we should have heard nothing about the gipsies. You only talk about 'they,' and say very little about 'them.' Of course, a pronoun is a word used instead of a noun; but if you do not know what noun it is used instead of, an indefinite article would do as well.

"I hope that what you have suffered will be a lesson to you; but as dear mamma is writing, she will warn you not to play truant again. You see, dear Richard, little boys are not so well able to take eare of themselves as they *sometimes fancy themselves*,

when they neglect the advice of their *more experienced elders.* But I will not remind you of the past.

"As everyone is writing to you except Miss Primer, I need only send her love and mine. With much from both,

"I remain, my dear Richard,

"Your affectionate sister,

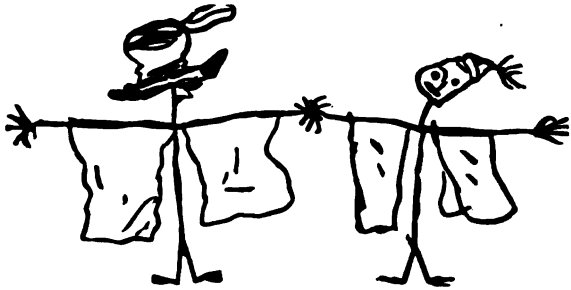
"LILY ABBOTT.

"*Master Richard Abbott.*"

"DEAR DICK,—I wish I'd been with you when you had breakfast with the gipsies. Do gipsies eat snakes and rats and hedgehogs? Lily says they do. Did you catch anything in the forest? Is Percy Sharpe a nice boy? If he is, I hope he will come over here, and then we three can go out catching together. We have lots of linnets about now. A day or two ago I caught a white butterfly with ever so many black spots, and papa says I have got a prize. Papa says it is a Bath White. Does Miss Lamblion let you use your net? I went with papa to Silverhanger yesterday. They have begun hop-picking there. It is such a pretty sight. I wish we had hops nearer home, but it is nice to ride into another county, and not to know when you have got into it. Some of the hoppers were very dark. I wonder whether they were your gipsies. I shouldn't have liked them so much if they were, and I'd known it.

"Your butterfly-smut doe has had young ones. The buck was going to eat them, but John pulled him out of the hutch. He snapped at John's hand before he could get a good tight clutch on his ears. ANNIE."

"DEAR DICKY,—I was so sorry I could have cried, that you and Master Sharpe should have been wandering about like babes in the wood. But perhaps I laughed that you were dressed up like scarecrows. Was it naughty? Did you look like my picture? You won't mind, will you? You are ever so much prettier than that. The one in the nightcap is you. I never saw Master Sharpe, so I could only guess. I shall be so glad when the holidays come. We shall have such fun, and you won't have to make up stories. I want to know how the gipsies were dressed. Your loving SUSIE.



"If Master Sharpe thinks my picture rude, please don't show it to him, Dicky. "S."

Dick took good care, by showing it, to get Percy's opinion as to whether the picture was rude or not.

"Anyhow, she's made me better-looking than you, Bantam," was Percy's verdict.

XI.

If she had known it, she would not have allowed it, but at Miss Lamblion's the big fellows, after the manner of boys, made pretty frequent bolstering incursions, in the dead of night, into the little chaps' bedroom. Dick had thought it very strange on the first occasion on which he had woke up, and found what seemed to be two sacks of corn thrashing away at him in the dark, as if he had been another; and he had not yet grown reconciled to the operation. A feather pillow may break no bones, but plied vigorously and continuously on a little boy's head, it can make him feel half stupid; and, however pleasant it may be to wake up to bolster, it is not so pleasant to have to wake up to be bolstered; and now, a short time after his adventure with the gipsies, he was convinced that there was something heavier and harder than feathers in one of the pillows which came down on him in the bolstering matches (if that can be called a match in which all the fighting is on one side), and that these had set in with greater frequency and severity than formerly. The greater frequency, no doubt, was only a fancy of Dick's, because when the bolstering raids did take place, he unquestionably was treated with more severity than he had been before. The hard substance referred to seemed to be sometimes a

square Latin dictionary, sometimes a thick-soled boot, sometimes a fives-bat, sometimes a cricket-ball, sometimes a stone or bit of brick. And whilst the other White-boys seemed to distribute their outrages impartially, the bearer of this loaded pillow kept on flailing away at Dick alone. It is a wonder the little fellow had no bruises to show: he had plenty of aches to bear. In other ways he found that somebody or other had what is vulgarly termed "a down" on him. One night when he jumped into bed he discovered that a toad had gone to bed before him. But though, of course, a toad is an unpleasant bed-fellow, this trick did not give to Dick the scare it was intended to. He knew too much about toads for that. His father had told him that it was all nonsense about toads being poisonous, and got John to believe so too, and always to keep one or more, if he could get them, in the garden; and very pleased John was when he found that the "nasty vermin," as he had been in the habit of calling them, kept his hot-beds and his flower-beds free from things that, in a garden, are really vermin.

As for "apple-pie beds," Dick had had those made for him at home; but the one he had made for him at school had stinging nettles in the fold of the turned-up sheet; and then, as that trick, of course, could only be played once, the sleeves of Dick's tunic were turned inside out, and nettles put into them; so that when Dick thrust in his arm to turn the sleeves out again, he might, whichever hand he put in first, be sure of another stinging.

That trick, also, could only be played once, but malice can always devise new modes of mischief. Sometimes Dick was aroused from his slumbers by "cold pig"—*i.e.*, a drenching of cold water—at midnight. Sometimes his bedclothes were spirited away, sometimes his day-clothes; sometimes he was jerked out of sleep, and almost pulled out of bed, by a stout string tied to his great toe; sometimes when he woke he found his leg fastened to the bed-post.

Next he was attacked in another way. Miss Lamblion's house had once been a gentleman's residence, and in the stable, coach-house, and hayloft, which, in addition, were only used for lumber-rooms, Miss Lamblion allowed her boys to keep pets.

Percy Sharpe had a pair of guinea-pigs,—sandy and white, and white and black,—and Dick Abbott had a squirrel, which John

had caught and asked leave to bring in for him, when he learnt that the "schoolmissis" would not confiscate it for school consumption in a rabbit pie.

Dick kept his squirrel—which he had named after himself—well supplied with nuts, and saved bread and milk for him from his own breakfast—which, after all, since "diet," in school-circular phrase, at Miss Lamblion's was really "unlimited," was no great proof of generosity on Dick's part. A treadmill cage for his squirrel had been given to Dick by his mamma; but when he found how the wire wore off the beauty of his pet's tail, he substituted a tea-chest for the cage, and both the Dicks seemed to approve of the change. A good part of the play-hours "Dick" spent out of his hutch, clambering about the out-premises, and perching himself in the highest places, in some of which he had laid up little hoards of nuts, which he would crack with his long foreteeth, and then, with saucy gravity, would drop the shells upon his master's head. His master knew well how sharp those foreteeth were, for Mr. "Dick" did not relish being put back into his hutch after his runs, and on one occasion had made those keen, curved chisels meet in his master's finger. After that Dick had taken care, when he wished to reconsign his namesake to his very mild captivity, to get a good grip on his neck from behind.

Percy's pets were not so interesting, but they were equally well looked after. Dick claimed a kind of honorary joint ownership in them, just as Percy did in the squirrel, and the two boys, when they were out walking in White Ladies, and elsewhere, joined in gathering sow-thistle, dandelions, etc., for Sniff and Snuff, as the two plump little creatures were called, from the funny little noises they made. Their bran, of course, Percy provided, and the cook gave him at least his share of her outside lettuce and cabbage leaves, shreds of parsley, and broken victuals, to which the rabbit fanciers also put in their claim.

Well, after morning school one day, when the little fellows ran into the stable, they found "Dick" in Sniff and Snuff's hutch, and all three dead; the straw was soaked with their mingled blood. When the other boys ran in to behold the melancholy spectacle, some one set afloat a theory that "Dick," having escaped from his own chest, had got into the guinea-pigs', with murderous intent, and had perished by their teeth as they by his.

The two owners were not of those who accepted this explanation, and, indeed, a good many other boys thought it by no means satisfactory.

Another thing happened.

At that time there was a craze amongst schoolboys who lived along the great Bath road for making cardboard models of the coaches which traversed it, just as when the Great Western Railway had been made, their successors used to make cardboard models of railway carriages and locomotives, with gold leaf for the brass of the boilers.

Most of the coaches had four horses, but a few had two. One of the four-horsed, which started from the Bush, Bristol (or the Rummer, was it ?) was contemptuously nicknamed "The Waggon," owing to the weary length of hours it took to make the journey to the Bull and Mouth, St. Martin's-le-Grand.

I have travelled in "The Waggon," but I am afraid to say how long the journey lasted, lest people, accustomed to railway-speeds only (and some of these seem to us abominably slow), should accuse me of exaggerating for the sake of effect. "The Regulator" was faster, but did not plume itself so much on its speed as on its accuracy. The mail-coaches were both fast and regular. People used to set their watches by them. It was a mail-coach Dick had undertaken to reproduce in miniature, and a very creditable reproduction he had turned out. The galloping horses did not look quite natural, because they had props under their bellies; but the many-caped coachman, the smart box-seat passenger in his single-caped great coat, the red-coated, gilt-banded guard, his horn, and its wicker basket, and the blazing Royal Arms upon the panels, were "more like than life."

Dick was very proud of his performance, and was looking forward to the admiration it would excite at home, when one morning, on opening his locker, he found coach and horses, coachman, guard, and passenger, all sodden in ink. The little hat inkstand above his locker was tilted on one side and empty, but how the ink from it, even if it had held enough, should have happened to soak the mail-coach so thoroughly, and yet scarcely have splashed anything else in the locker, was a mystery.

Again, the little boys were very fond of telling, amongst others, ghost-stories in bed; and a terrible collection they made up

between them—about headless horsemen, heads and hands floating in the air without bodies, walking-sticks walking by themselves, chains clanking in cellars, invisible persons heard walking up and down stairs, bleeding nuns, candles blown out when not a breath of wind was stirring, haunted bedrooms in which no one could sleep, haunted dining-rooms that had been locked up for years, and in which, at midnight, ghostly guests were said to assemble around tables laden with tarnished vessels, on which the viands had crumbled, and from which the drink had dried up, many and many a year ago; and so on, and so on. Well, one night, after one of these grisly narratives, Percy said to Dick, "Why, Bantam, I do believe, for all your crowing, you're scared, you coward!" And Dick answered, angrily, "I'm no more a coward than you are. You'd be scared enough if you were really to see a ghost. I know I should be, and I don't mind owning it. *I'm* not a sham."

The very next night, in the small hours, Dick was awoke by having his bed-clothes drawn off, and looking towards the foot of the bed he saw a ghostly face glaring down on him. The hair, the eyebrows, the eyes and ears, the nose and mouth, and the outline of the face, were all on fire, which burnt a quivering bluish-white, and gave forth a little rolling smoke. After a time it began to fade a little, and then gradually retreating backwards, vanished at the bedroom door, leaving Dick dumb and almost dead with terror. He did not say anything about the ghost to anyone. He knew that he would be only laughed at, not believed. So night after night he went to bed in silent dread. He used to try to keep Percy or somebody talking, and was a very miserable little fellow when all the other boys had gone to sleep.

He was roughly delivered from his fear. One night, between nine and ten, some one at the door, the youngest housemaid, as he thought from the voice, said, "Master Abbott, Master Abbott, make haste and put on your clothes, and run down into the kitchen. Your cook is here."

Dick shuffled on his clothes and rushed for the stairs. He had only got down two or three when he tripped, and fell heavily on his head upon the stone landing. The noise of his fall brought Miss Carter up with a light, and a good many of the boys ran down to see what was the matter. Dick was insensible. "He

must have been walking in his sleep," said Fred Shum. "I've heard him say that he used to walk in his sleep at home."

Miss Carter took up Dick in her arms and carried him to the sick-room, and the boys went back to bed, wondering how it could have happened—all except two; these were Fred Shum and Bill Reed, who was in the secret of all the tricks Shum had played on Dick. I said before that, after his first meanness to Dick, Shum was despised by all the boys; so perhaps you will think that I am contradicting myself in saying that he still had a confidential chum. But this Reed, though he chuckled over Shum's mischief, did not think any the more highly of him for it. At any rate, he was conscience-smitten now, and was overheard to say, "That was *too* bad, Shum."

This speech coming to Miss Lamblion's ears, she instituted a strict inquiry, and Reed turned Queen's evidence.

Shum, he said, had placed a hassock on the middle of one of the stairs, and then, mimicking the housemaid's voice, had called Dick out of bed. When Dick tripped, the hassock had rolled after him to the landing, where it usually stood, and so there was nothing to show how the accident happened. And even if the hassock had remained on the stair, Shum had calculated it would be supposed to have been left there by chance.

Next Reed revealed that Shum had been the author of all Dick's other persecutions—from the loaded bolstering down to the phosphorus ghost, of which the rest of the household heard for the first time.

Miss Lamblion's scalding indignation boiled over. She was almost as angry with Reed as with Shum. To Reed, however, she at last consented to give a second chance.

Shum, however, she expelled at once, and went with him to his home to explain the reason.

She was too eager to get him out of the house to wait two hours for the coach that passed his father's house. She ordered his boxes to be packed at once, and rattled off with him and them in a post-chaise.

As the post-boy cracked his whip, Fred's schoolmates, clustered at the windows and blue gates, would have given him a hearty hiss had they not been afraid that it would sound like hissing their schoolmistress.

XII.

LIFE in the sick-room, with Mrs. Dow to nurse him, governesses and servants to pity and pet him, and schoolmates to look in to learn how he was getting on, Dick found a by no means unendurable mode of existence. He got on so fast that in about a week's time a many-coloured fading bruise on his forehead was the only thing the matter with him.

However, for a few days more he was excused school, and allowed to ramble about the premises where he pleased. He helped, or fancied he did, the man who had been hired to do up the garden, in sowing his annuals, planting his bulbs, and looking after his dahlias and hollyhocks, and wanted to try his hand at budding roses, but this the gardener would not permit. When the old man went into the kitchen garden Dick went with him, and made himself as busy there in sowing onions and so on, earthing up celery, digging up potatoes, and picking cucumbers.

This old man, Master Worts, as he was called, had, like most gardeners, a very high opinion of his profession and of his own proficiency in it, and consequently (though *why* consequently it is hard to say) of his own opinion on any subject on which he deigned to pass it. As to gardening matters he was absolute, claiming a Pope-like infallibility concerning them. Miss Lamblion could manage most persons she had to do with, but she was obliged to let old Worts have his own way in the garden. He would sometimes deign to listen to hints, but he would never take instructions; and as to the hints he attended to them or not just as he pleased. He had picked up a little botanical Latin, of which he was very proud. All other Latin he looked upon as childish nonsense. When he found that Dick could not give him the Latin for celery, he expressed the utmost scorn of his claims to be called a Latin scholar.

I am afraid Dick gave Worts some reason for despising school Latin, for, wishing to find out whether the old man really knew as much about it as he pretended to know, the young rascal pretended on his side that this was the way in which the first declension was said at school:

"Musa, musæ,
The gods were at tea,
Musæ, musam,
Eating raspberry jam,
Musa, musâ,
Made by Cupid's mamma,

"Musæ, musarum,
Thou diva dearum,
Musis, musas,
Said Jove to the lass.
Musæ, musis,
Can ambrosia beat this?"

Dick had learnt this out of a funny book, and, taking it for his model, he went on with the second declension on his own account, thus:

"Dominus, domini,
Baby, don't cry;
Domino, dominum,
Rumti-ti-tum;
Domine, domino,
My first go;
Domini, Dominorum,
The bullocks will gore 'em;
Dominis, dominos,
Mind you keep close;
Domini, dominis,
Good-day to you, miss."

"Yes," growled Worts, taking it all in, "that's the stuff and nonsense you've got to larn. The missus has got a great name for that sort o' gibberish. I wonder she bain't ashamed to larn it to ye, for she don't want for sense in some things. Keepin' a garden in right order bain't one on 'em. It's lucky for her she's got me to look arter it. And I'm willin', for she bain't such a bad sort o' lady." This was very high praise from Worts. Positive commendation never passed his lips.

Worts had a little grandson, an exact facsimile of himself, even to the breeches,—"Little Corduroys," Miss Lamblion's boys loftily called him,—whom the old man sometimes took with him when he went out jobbing. This little chap Worts brought with him one day during the time in which Dick had the run of the garden.

Now Little Corduroys thought that his grandfather was the

greatest man in the universe—the strongest the knowingest, the everythingest. He trotted after old Worts on his funny little plump-calved, brown-stockinged legs; he fetched and carried for him like a little dog. In one respect, owing to his youth, Corduroys differed from his grandfather. He was of a more mercurial temperament. He occasionally into strange vagaries fell—as he would dance, until checked by his grandfather's grave eye, and burst forth in snatches of the hymns he had learnt at the Sunday-school, until similarly pulled up. He was hopping about chanting, "Be joyful, be joyful, be joyful," when Dick came into the garden; and seeing no reason why he should treat him with reverence, Little Corduroys ran up to him and addressed him with great affability. Master Dick was foolish enough to turn away from the little "common boy" in silent disdain; whereupon Little Corduroys challenged him to run, or to wrestle, or to fight. The idea of fighting or wrestling a little plebeian like that! thought Dick indignantly; but, to show his superiority to a common boy, he consented to race Little Corduroys down the middle path to the well at the bottom of the garden. "One, two, three, and away," he cried. Off they went, and soon the young gentleman had the mortification of seeing the little common boy's brown stockings twinkling away ahead of him. Little Corduroys won, and was plainly so proud of his victory that Dick in a pet gave him a push which sent him on to the wooden well-cover; and this, being rotten, broke, and into the water with a splash fell Little Corduroys. Dick in great alarm let down the bucket, of which the other little boy caught hold, and was wound up by his grandfather, who had hurried to the well in answer to Dick's shouts for help.

When old Worts had mopped and wiped his grandson as well as he could, he bade him run home and change his clothes; and Dick gave him the only shilling which he happened just then to have, saying that he was very sorry for what had happened; whereupon old Worts growled, "Mighty fine, young master. You nigh drowned the lad because he licked you in running, and now you give him a shillun and think yerself as lib'ral as a lord!"

After this the old man kept on growling so much like a bear with a sore head, that Dick sidled away from him; bnt when he had got to a distance the old man kept on shouting at him, as if he were trampling down the beds, picking fruit, or committing

some other enormity. So Dick retreated from the garden to the outhouses.

"The little boy caught hold of the bucket, and was wound up by his grandfather."

Here Dick had once more a pet of his own.

As some compensation for his share in Dick's persecutions, Reed

had given him a beautiful big black and white butterfly-smut, lop-eared buck rabbit, of which he had been very fond, and he had bought Percy Sharpe another pair of guinea-pigs. Dick took out his buck, and after stroking its long ears against its sides, put it down to hirple about on the stable floor, while he cleaned its hutch, sprinkled the botton with sand, refilled the trough with bran and the pan with water, and put in some fresh lettuce—flinging away the wilted remains of a cabbage-leaf—and a new piece of wood for the buck to gnaw instead of his house, just as, they say, wood has to be provided for Yankees, to prevent them from whittling the furniture.

There were half-lops, horn-lops, oar-lops, besides common rabbits at Miss Lamblion's, but Dick's was the only full-lop, and he was very proud of it. He had taken it up, and was stroking it again, when in came Little Corduroys in dry clothes. "Here's your shillun," he cried, tendering it. "Mother says it bain't enough. You might ha' drownded me."

But Dick would not take back the shilling.

"Well, if you wunt, you wunt, and I'll keep it; but it bain't enough, mother says," growled Little Corduroys.

Dick offered to give him some more money, as soon as he got any; or anything else he had to give. Little Corduroys' greedy eyes fastened like ferrets on the beautiful buck.

"Be that there rabbut yourn?" he asked.

"Yes," faltered Dick, aghast.

"Then give me that there rabbut."

In vain Dick asked the sturdy little mendicant to choose something else, and promised him more than the buck's worth in money, if he would only take it in instalments. The buck in hand was what Little Corduroys was bent on securing, and as he had passed his word, Dick was obliged to give it up to him. Off he ran with it in triumph to show it to his grandfather before taking it home, and Dick wished bitterly—well, I will not say that Little Corduroys had never been fished out of the well, but that he had never been tempted to knock him into it, through having condescended to run a race with the greedy, vulgar little wretch. That is what Dick called the little gardener in his wrath. Reed was very angry when he heard what had happened. He told Dick that he had given his beauty to him, to make up for the squirrel;

that he would never have given it away, if he had thought that it would be given away again to that little blackguard of a Corduroys.

So that altogether this buck business was a very unpleasant one for Dick; the moral of which is this:—Don't knock vulgar little boys into wells if you race with them, and they happen to beat you in running.

One Wednesday, which was poultry, fruit, and vegetable market day in Brackenbury, Mrs. Dow had to go into town to buy some fowls, and since Dick had still no lessons to learn, but yet was able to run about, she took him with her.

A market in a country town where the wares have been brought in from a circle of some ten miles or so around the town by the fresh-coloured folk behind the stalls, is always a cheerful sight. The golden butter in cabbage-leaf and vine-leaf, stamped pat and smooth roll; the white eggs nestling in their moss; the funny little cheeses, the cream-cheeses looking as cool as they taste; the home-made bread; the purple and green plums; the brown nuts and medlars; the rosy, russet, bronzy, green and golden apples and pears; the round baskets of peas and beans; the little heaps of washed potatoes; the punnets of mushrooms fresh from the Downs; the crisp, curly green salading set off with crimson slices of beetroot; the great, smooth, and prickly cucumbers, some curved like C's, some straight as truncheons; the big brown and red-skinned onions; the silvery leeks, the carrots, radishes, parsnips, cauliflowers, turnips, celery, embossed in red, yellow, white, and pink on a green jumble of cabbages; the aromatic herbs, telling of their presence even when unseen; the dangling plucked chickens, capons, hens, pullets, ducks, geese, turkeys, and turkey-poults; the velvet-polled wild duck, the dainty little teal, the ashen, rain-bow-shot wild pigeons, the wild rabbits that had been nibbling wild thyme a few hours before, the white-bellied hairs with backs like faded bracken, the black moor-fowl, and the brown and red, good-natured, excited faces of the country sellers, with the September sunlight showing off the smart clothes of the younger women—all this, Dick thought, made a very pretty picture in Brackenbury market; and, to his great delight, he fell in with one or two people from Foxearth, and so could get the latest news from home.

At a poultry stall he met Mrs. Buskitt, who was cheapening a turkey and fowls for a dinner which old Peters gave annually to

Brackenbury Market.

some angling acquaintances after a week's competition in pike fishing. She had heard neither of Dick's accident nor of Shum's expulsion.

"Well," she exclaimed, when Mrs. Dow had told her what had happened, "I always thought that Master Shum was a foolish, boasting kind of a young gentleman, but I did not think he would have done a mean thing like that. Why, Master Abbott, it seems as if you never were to be out of the wars."

Just then Dick pointed to a tall woman who had passed, and whispered, "That's one of the women who stole our clothes."

Hereupon, poor nervous Mrs. Dow began to tremble like an aspen leaf, but Mrs. Buskitt, who was a very plucky little woman, without waiting to ask herself whether she had any legal right to do so, caught hold of the woman's arm, crying that she wanted her. The gipsy's black eyes flashed, as if she did not relish being so roughly handled; but "*What* do you want me for, my pretty lady?" she wheedled. "Cross my hand with silver, and I'll tell you a fortune as fair as your face."

"You stole this little boy's clothes," cried Mrs. Buskitt.

At the sight of Dick, the gipsy with one scythe-like sweep of her strong brown right arm knocked back both him and his companions, and set off at a run.

"Stop thief!" cried Mrs. Buskitt, and instantly the market resounded with "Stop thief, stop thief!" and people came rushing from their stalls to see what was the matter.

The plump beadle of the market tried to stop the gipsy, but she, held in no reverence his staff of office and gilt-banded hat, and being an experienced bruiser, gave him with her left a tremendous blow in what is vulgarly called "the breadbasket," which sent him over on his back upon the ground, where he lay panting and flapping like an overturned turtle.

The gipsy rushed out into the street, with Mrs. Buskitt and Dick after her.

"Stop her!" cried Mrs. Buskitt to a town constable she knew.

"What for, ma'am?" deliberately inquired the constable.

"Oh, never mind that; I'll tell you that afterwards," cried Mrs. Buskitt. "Run after her, and stop her."

"No, Mrs. Buskitt, ma'am, I can't do that," said the constable; "I can't do that, unless I've got reason why. You see I ain't witnessed no breach o' the peace, no larc'ny, nor fel'ny, nor the like o' that, wi' my own individiule eyes. So I can't take her without a warrant. That's how it is, you see, Mrs. Buskitt.

Besides, what'd be the good o' cutting after her now? How she do go! A powerful female that, most like as strong in the arm as the leg. Hows'ever, I'll keep my eyes on her, so that we may know where to nail her when she's wanted, if she should come back in to the town—which p'r'aps ain't likely—anyhow for one while. And now, Mrs. Buskitt, what's it all about?"

When he had heard, he said to Mrs. Dow, who had just come up all in a tremble, "Well, ma'am, if you are the young gentleman's mamma, my advice to you is this: as you should go before the magistrate—his Washup's settin' now at the Town Hall—and apply for a warrant."

"But I'm not his mamma," replied poor agitated Mrs. Dow. "He has a dear mamma and papa of his own,—the Reverend Richard Abbott, M.A., Vicar of Foxearth."

"Oh, in that case," said the constable, "the reverend gent's next friend,—Poachin' Amy, as the lawyers call it: it seems a rum name for a person o' the male sex, don't it, ladies? but there's a many rum things in the lor. You see," proceeded the constable, anxious to efface from Mrs. Buskitt's mind any impression she might have formed unfavourable to his reputation as an intelligent and energetic executor of the law, by becoming its lucid expositor, "this is how the law of the thing stands, you see. These gipsies, they call themselves Egyptians, but the lor calls 'em outlandish persons; and I've heard say that if the magistrates chose to put the lor in force, they could string up every man Jack and woman Jill of 'm that didn't take themselves off, at a month's notice, to the place from which they came. So you may be sure it'll be easy enough to get a warrant against such as them: *I'll* keep my eyes open. You get a warrant, and then you shall see what I'll do with it. I won't let grass grow under *my* feet. Good mornin' ladies."

XIII.

Dick had gone back, quite well, to the school-room, where he was more petted than ever by Miss Carter; the Michaelmas holidays were close at hand—which Dick had received permission to ask Percy to spend with him at home, and the invitation had been accepted; but before their visit to Foxearth the little boys were destined to have another adventure. Once a quarter Miss

Lamblion's dancing master, who was the only one in Brackenbury, used to gather together his pupils from the various schools he taught, in the afternoon, at the Assembly Rooms, for a final general lesson, which was something like a ball. The under-masters and mistresses of the schools sat round the room like wall-flowers, holding a *conversazione* of weak tea, or whatever it might be, and weaker conversation. The Professor provided "light refreshments" for them as well as his pupils, and took care that they should be very light. The strongest beverage in warm weather was sparkling lemonade, and, in cold, what tasted like lukewarm still lemonade, with plenty of pips left in it—called by the Professor "punch," or rather "ponsch." However, the girls liked dancing with boys, and a good many (not all) of the boys liked dancing with girls better than dancing with one another; and so these gatherings were greatly looked forward to, especially since they came just before the Easter, Midsummer, Michaelmas, and Christmas holidays. The tradesmen, standing at their shop-doors, used to grin at the trains of two-and-two "young ladies" and "young gentlemen," as they were called on the brass plates of their respective "seminaries" and "academies," trooping through the streets, with their dancing-pumps wrapped up in brown paper under their arms, towards the rooms. Some of the smaller street boys, attracted by the sound of the music, would venture up the steps and into the lobby of the rooms, and peer through the inner glass doors; but when they ventured to pop in their tousled heads, and sbout impertinent inquiries as to how much an hour the dancers got for "all that there bobbin' about," the nodding hall-keeper roused himself from his chair, and made a rush at the invaders which sent them flying, often head foremost, down the steps into the street. The Professor did not play upon his fiddle on these solemn occasions, but engaged a full band, or "strong orchestra," as he preferred to call it, of three—nay, sometimes four—performers. A good deal of juvenile flirtation went on at these assemblies, old pupils renewing their acquaintance, and new pupils forming fresh friendships. Billets-doux and love-tokens were exchanged, of which the former would often have done very well, spelling included, for "exercises in false English." The presents, on the boys' side, were chiefly of a sticky, confectionery kind—Bath buns, acidulated drops and bulls'-eyes conglomerated with

paper, sugared almonds as warm from the pocket as eggs just taken from the nest, Spanish liquorice, jujubes, toffee, and butter-scotch, which, like the bulls'-eyes, had to be eaten striped and patched with bits of the paper in which they had been wrapped—and things like that. And these were the presents which the girls liked: marbles had been tried on them, but they said they were not good to eat; and when a little boy in straitened circumstances or of penurious disposition tendered the brass button of his top-string, which he had painfully polished up with brickdust and a bit of borrowed washleather, the lady of his love indignantly called him a stingy little beggar, and scornfully informed him that she never accepted presents which had not cost anything. The girls' presents were not good to eat either, and could not have cost much, even of time and trouble; but it was "the thing" amongst the boys to be very proud if they got them, especially if locks of hair. Some luckless boys, never favoured by the fair, cut off oily locks of their own hair, tied them up with blue ribbon, and carried them about in greasy bits of white paper, which looked as if they had wedding-cake inside.

On the whole, Dick thought his first assembly pretty good fun, although he did not quite relish having to caper about in public; dancing, of the measured kind, not being a performance in which he was particularly skilful, and vain little Master Dick liking to exhibit only those accomplishments in which he was a proficient. The Professor had rooms on the first floor of an old house in ancient Minster Street hard by. The ground floor had been turned into a shop and warehouses, but the projecting upper stories still bore signs of having belonged to a stately mansion. The half-whitewashed, half-wainscoted wall of one of the Professor's rooms bore Queen Elizabeth's arms,—a circumstance which had led him, being a pompous little man, to hire the lodgings. He was constantly bragging about the royal arms in his apartment, as if they somehow reflected dignity on him. The French master, who was rather jealous of his countryman (of an Englishman he would not condescend to be jealous), said that "Mister de Professeur of danse vould make to believe dat your Queen Elizabet vos in lovv vid 'im;" adding, with a sneer, that "he had sufficient of age."

When the dancing was over, the light refreshments had all dis-

appeared, and the shawling, bonneting, and re-booting were going on, the Professor, seeing Miss Carter and our two young friends waiting for the other boys—who were making no particular haste to get ready for their return to school, although frequently adjured thereto by the shrill-tongued Miss Quinciner—asked the junior teacher and her couple of little squires to step across the way to see his famous escutcheon.

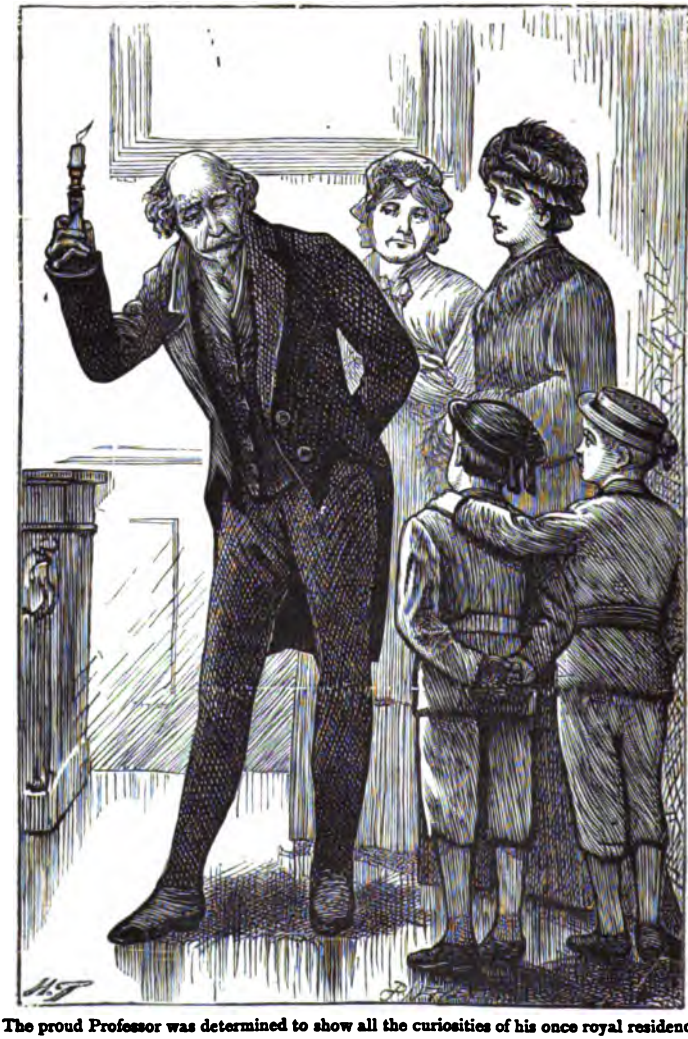
Accordingly they went and saw the shield, with its quarterings of lilies and leopards, its crowned lion for a crest, its crowned lion and winged four-legged dragon instead of unicorn for supporters, its E.R., its big *Honi soit qui mal y pense*, and its little *Dieu et mon droit*.

This was all that was really worth seeing in the old house, and even of this—since, through ever so many coatings of whitewash, it could only be indistinctly made out in a dim room—Dick and Percy did not think much. Having once caught Miss Carter, however, the proud Professor was determined to show her all the curiosities of his once royal residence. Accordingly he rang for his landlady, and having first craved her permission, begged the favour of a lighted candle, and the pleasure of her company in escorting the young lady over the historic mansion which she had honoured with her presence. So off the three grown-up people set, the two boys loitering at their heels,—thinking the whole affair a kind of a lark, but wishing it were a livelier one.

The good woman of the house, as she had nothing particular to do (if it had been washing or baking day, perhaps she might not have been so good-tempered), seemed pleased that her foreign lodger should think there was anything in her dark old house (which *she* considered very inconvenient) that a young English lady would like to see. But the good woman had only recently come to the house from the country, and knew nothing of its history, even if it had a history which anybody knew anything about. She couldn't say if there were any ghostesses in it—like enough, but she'd never seen none; rats there was, she knew, for if she hadn't seen 'em she'd heard 'em oft enough, and was afraid every time she went into her pantry, she was, as they'd burst through, and eat her up as well as the wittles.

The Professor had lived longer in the house, but did not know much more about it than its mistress did. He, however, was an

assiduous reader of the Waverley Novels (their author he sometimes called "Sir Scott," sometimes "de great Voltaire," as if a



"The proud Professor was determined to show all the curiosities of his once royal residence."

Frenchman had written them), and suggested all kinds of romantic narratives as he led the way along narrow passages, up and down

purposeless little flights of steps set right in the midst of the passages, up steep corkscrew staircases, into dark closets, notwithstanding his somewhat scandalised landlady's assurances that there was "nothing in 'em but women's gownds an' sich;" and into low-pitched rooms with heavy beams running across their ceilings at right angles. In one of these stood an old-fashioned wardrobe built on to the wainscot, with a sliding door which the Professor called the "secret panel." This wardrobe, he insisted, had often been the refuge of persecuted priests, nonjuring clergymen, cavaliers, and Jacobites hiding from their enemies.

At the Professor's request his landlady unlocked the door of a disused cellar. "What on earth use it was to her, or under the earth ayther, for that was more like, *she* couldn't tell for *her* part," said the good woman. "It was so big and dark and deep as she could never keep her beer there, for she hadn't the heart to send the girl to draw it where she was afraid to go herself. No, nor coals nor wood nayther when she'd a place a deal nigher daylight to store 'em in. And what was the good o' talkin' o' hangin' out clothes to dry there on a rainy day? Much they'd dry in that damp place, and a nice colour they'd be, even if the rats didn't drag 'em off the lines."

The door was locked once more, and poor Miss Carter had again to toil to the top of the house to visit a garret which had unfortunately been overlooked during the first inspection of the highest floor. The Professor was sure that it must have some very interesting history, but the only thing remarkable that Miss Carter could find in it was that, except exactly the middle, she could not stand upright in it. Availing herself of the gabled attic's superior light to look at her watch, she was astonished to find how fast time had flown. She told the Professor and his landlady that she must leave at once, and called for the boys to accompany her. Again and again they were called for, search was made for them all over the house, but nowhere could they be found. They must have got tired, and gone back to the Rooms, thought Miss Carter; and to the Rooms she went. The school, all the schools, had left some time before, said the door-keeper. "Ah well, no doubt I shall find them at home," said Miss Carter to herself. Nevertheless, up Castle Hill she hurried at a rate which Miss Quinciner would have called highly unbecoming. If summoned instantly to her mother's

death-bed, Miss Quinciner would never have hurried. But at Miss Lamblion's nothing had been heard or seen of Dick and Percy, whose second disappearance again threw the school into confusion.

"Some fatality must attach to those boys," exclaimed agitated, irritated Miss Lamblion; and then, rather illogically, she gave poor Miss Carter a good scolding.

Miss Quinciner did not care much about the boys; but, of course, she could not lose her chance of making spiteful little remarks about Miss Carter's unmaidenly readiness to throw herself in the way of single gentlemen; the Professor being, in fact, a confirmed old bachelor, as unwilling to take to himself a wife as "Mossoo" was of obtaining one.

This time I will not keep you long in suspense as to the fate of our young monkeys.

The big, deep, dimly-lighted cellar had taken their fancy; and when their elders went upstairs again, they lingered behind, and the key having been left in the keyhole, they unlocked the door and went in on to the first step, closing the door after them. Down the worn steps they picked their path as carefully as the faint light would permit, and then groped their way about the, in some places, pitch-dark cavern, bumping themselves up against the rough walls, and feeling that their shoes and clothes, faces and hands, were getting very filthy. Like some explorers of coalpits, they had found that there was not much fun in groping about in dark, dirty places, just for the sake of saying you have been there, and were feeling their way back to the steps when something gave way under them, and down they dropped,—Dick thinking that a second judgment had come upon him for pushing Little Corduroys into the well.

However, they fell unhurt, though very frightened, on some stuff that seemed to be like sand, damp, but soft. When they felt about, they found that they were in some kind of shaft. When Dick got on Percy's shoulders, he could not feel the top of it; and yet they thought it could not be very deep, because they did not seem to have fallen far. At any rate, it was deep enough to be a cage for them; and when they thought of what the mistress of the house had said about the rats, they were terribly afraid. To be eaten by rats in a deep hole in a dark cellar, instead of going to Foxearth to spend the Michaelmas holidays! Ugh! They raised

a piteous cry for help, but it was not heard, and no one came to their relief.

As they tumbled about like blind bears in a pit, they found an opening in the side of the shaft. They entered it, and since its flooring seemed to rise gradually, they followed it, in the hope that it might lead them into the upper air. They soon found that it did not go regularly up, but up and down. Whether it went straight or not, they, floundering about in the darkness, could not tell. Sometimes they could walk upright—sometimes nearly so; at other times they had to stoop, crouch, even go upon their hands and knees. But on they staggered, feeling their way as carefully as they were able—for what better could they do?

At last what felt like a bulkhead of wood blocked the passage. They pushed and butted at it, but it would not move; they hammered on it, but no one answered. Weary and wretched, they could not help crying, and then lying down for a bit in sullen despair.

They had just plucked up heart enough to begin to try to grope their way back when they heard steps on the other side of the bulkhead, and presently a sound as of a liquid pouring into a jug. Again they hammered, and heard a noise as of the smash of crockery, screams, and footsteps scurrying away in the distance.

Once more they heard footsteps approaching, and again began to hammer; but suddenly ceased, when a gruff voice growled, "Now, then, you scoundrels, whoever ye be, look out, for I'm a-goin' to fire."

"Oh, father, do pray be careful," cried a voice which Dick knew.

"Oh, Mrs. Buskitt, Mrs. Buskitt!" he shrieked; "it's me—me—me—Dick Abbott, Dick Abbott."

The shouldered gun was evidently very soon laid down, and some one began to work with a will on the bulkhead. After a great deal of unscrewing and prizing, it slanted and was gradually lowered to the ground, and Dick and Percy, blinking even in feeble candle-light, crawled out into old Peters's cellar, to which they had found their way from the Professor's house at the other end of the street on the opposite side of the road.

"Well, young gentlemen," said old Peters, wiping his forehead,

before he put on his coat again, "you've pretty nigh skeared my servant girl out of her wits, and you've cost me a good jug, and the best part of a quart o' prime old ale, and that's worse, let alone my labour in lugging that great thing down, and having to put it up agin. Hows'iver, I ain't sorry, on the whole, I've dug ye out like a couple of young badgers, instead of shootin' of ye. I'd the hole blocked up just because it *was* a hole—and p'r'aps to keep the rats out. I never thought till to-night there was any chance of robbers getting in—didn't rightly believe as it led to nowhere."

"You little Pickles—and what a pickle you're in," said good-natured Mrs. Buskitt, when she had heard the boys' story. "You surely must be meant to be Lord Chancellors or Archbishops of Canterbury, or something of that sort, to have come safe through what you've gone through!"

She washed them, and brushed them as well as she could, gave them something to eat and to drink, and then hurried off with them to Miss Lamblion's; where, by both flock and shepherdesses, the lost sheep were received with so much triumphant joy that they were not, I fear, as much ashamed of their truancy as they ought to have been.

The Professor was prouder than ever when he found that a subterranean passage led from his royal residence. He could not be dissuaded from wriggling his way up and down Minster Street, underground; and would fain have had the passage kept open, in order that he might repeat the experiment with any admiring friend he could prevail upon to accompany him. But his landlady insisted upon her husband's not only bricking up the hole in the shaft, but securely covering in its top. "Who was to know," she asked, "when—let alone buglers—the gasmen, or the water-rates, or the dreens, might come dropping in upon them unaweers?"

XIV.

At last the happy time had come, the afternoon before Michaelmas Day. John had come over with the chaise—Floss whisking her silver tail and flirting her silver mane when Dick came out, as if to greet him. Patient Peter, thinking, no doubt, "Well, there's another two pair off my mind for a week—four, counting Sundays,"

had stowed away our little friends' carpet-bags under the back seat, and stood waiting for their start with as near an approach to a grin on his face as it ever relaxed into. Although the sun shone brightly, and almost as warm as in the middle of August, Mrs. Dow was "tucking in" Dick and Percy, who shared the front seat with John, as carefully as if it were the depth of winter. Miss Carter and their stay-at-school schoolmates were waving, or, like Peter, grinning their good-byes from the schoolroom window. Miss Lamblion stood on the top of the doorsteps, majestically smiling hers. Miss Quinciner, to the secret delight of all left behind, had gone to spend her Michaelmas holidays with her maiden sister. Without looking round, John raised his finger and whip handle to his hat-brim as a general valediction to all and sundry, and off went Floss at a fine rate, just as if she knew how anxious Dick was to get home. When quite clear of the town, John let the boys drive in turn, but even this delicious indulgence would not win for him those early full particulars of their gipsy and other adventures which he desired to be the first to communicate to his fellow servants. The boys had made a compact that they would not give any but the vaguest account of their experiences until they arrived at Foxearth. As to the subterranean passage, that was not even to be mentioned to John, since not a rumour of that crowning exploit could have reached the village. As the chaise drove through it, the cottagers, standing at their doors, nodded their kindly welcome-back to Dick. Some of them touched their hats, pulled their forelocks, or bobbed, as if they had suddenly sunk about a couple of feet into the ground, to the huge satisfaction of Dick, since this manifestation of general respect made Percy also look upon him with reverence as a kind of public character. The parish clerk being one in village estimation, the chaise pulled up to enable him to give "the young parson" verbal congratulations on his return. At the sound of the wheels Annie and Susie raced to the gate to open it.

In the porch stood papa, mamma, Lily, and the servants—Miss Primer had gone home for the holidays—all the womenfolk looking a great deal more cheerful than they had done when Dick took his departure for Brackenbury. The fuss everybody made over him made Percy for half a minute half jealous. Percy living in Brackenbury, *his* going to school and coming home were not

considered important epochs in the family history; and besides, he had gone to school and come home more than once. However, he had not long to complain of neglect. He was heartily greeted, and soon felt himself almost as much at home as Dick; the chief difference being, of course, special courtesy shown to the young guest. What Percy pronounced to be "a real prime tea,"—"stunner," as I may perhaps have remarked before, not having them come into vogue, and "quite too awfully jolly" lying hidden in the womb of a very remote future—had a good deal to do with the ease with which Percy made himself at home. Miss Lamblion, as has been said, gave her boys good food *ad libitum;* many parents even thought that, for sake of her own pocket, she ought to have been more sparing, that the terms she received for her pupils did not justify the provision she made for them; but, of course, she would have soon been in the bankruptcy or insolvency court if she had given her boys every night such a tea as Percy found waiting for him at Foxearth.

In those old-fashioned times country people seemed to have a notion that townsfolk, for economy's sake, owing to a dear supply of stale provender, or from the languor cause by bad air, had contracted a habit of feigning a bad appetite, or had really got one, out of both of which ailments they must be shaken when they ventured beyond the ring of brick and mortar, with a hospitable—"But you must eat and drink now—remember you have come into the country."

Percy did not need any such urging when he sat down to tea, coffee, delicious cream, almost as *ad libitum* as his milk at school, toast dry and buttered, wafery bread and butter, or rather butter and bread, substantial home-made new loaves and rolls of home-made butter, of the colour of primroses, and as cool and fragrant; tea-cakes, plum-cake, biscuits, cold fowl, a parsley-garnished ham, just cut to give it a hospitable homely look; cucumber, and garnet and ruby, jet and amber-hued preserves, in quantity sufficient to show that they were not meant to be locked at merely.

Lilly was very gracious to the young guest, but since she called him "*little* Percy," and classed him with "the children," he thought her stuck up, and somewhat resented her patronage, or rather matronage. After tea there was time for "the children" to take him to get a first view of their treasures. Susie, when she

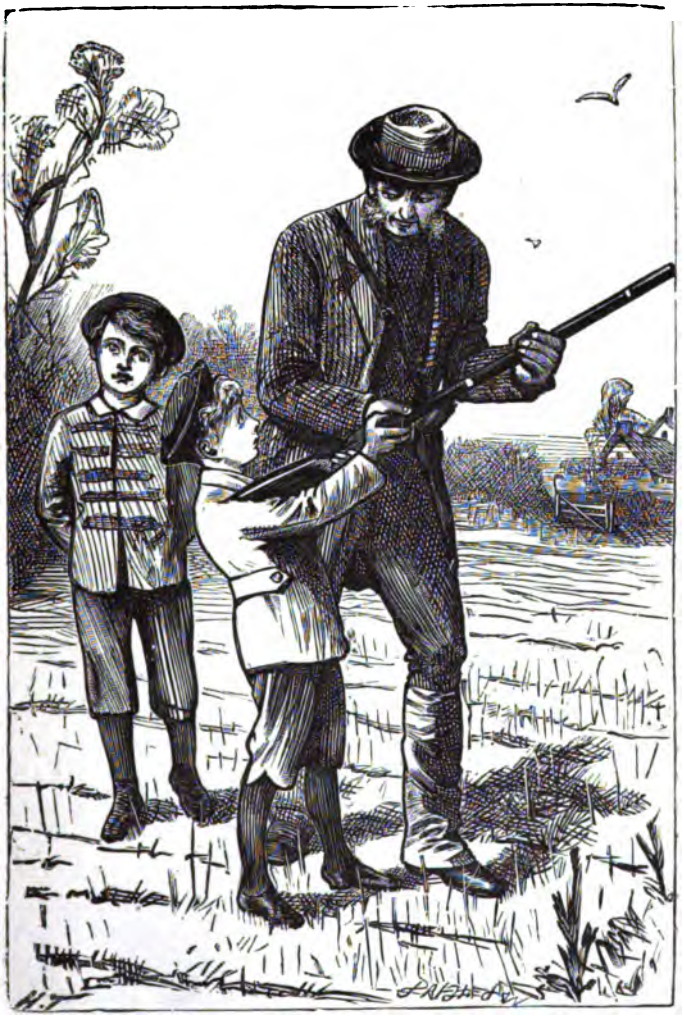
found that her brother had shown Percy her fancy portrait of him, was rather shy, but finding that he was not in the slightest degree offended by her caricature, saying that, under the circumstances, he considered it rather a compliment, Susie, who had great faith in her power to make people writhe under her satirical delineations of them, arrived at the conclusion that Master Sharpe must be a very good-natured boy, and took to him accordingly. He and Annie, too, were soon fast friends.

Even during Dick's short absence there had been changes in the pet-world at Foxearth. The cat had had kittens,—a large family, but not one had been drowned, because, when they were born, there happened, fortunately, to be an abundance of mice and a scarcity of cats in the neighbourhood. All the gold fish had died of fright in a thunderstorm; but uncle had promised to stock the bowl again—he knew a man who bred gold-fish, and silver-fish too, in warm water he got as waste from a brewery. "They weren't like other pets," said Annie; "one fish was as good as another to be fond of." On the condition of the rabbits and guinea-pigs, Dick and Percy, after their school experiences, of course passed judgment with the decision of venerable authorities. The little girls were very indignant when they heard of the fate of Percy's pigs, Dick's squirrel, and also of his lop-eared buck. That nasty boy Master Shum's expulsion only partially satisfied their sense of justice, whilst as to Little Corduroys, they thought that though it was, of course, naughty of Dick to knock him into the well, it was almost a pity he had ever been got out. Annie's "most recent additions," as the Zoological Gardens advertisements say, were scrutinized with great interest—to wit, a mole as fierce as a bull-dog, and a crippled jackdaw, which she and John between them—they being the chief members of the Foxearth Surgical Aid Society—had furnished with a wooden-leg; John, rather ungraciously, also conferring on him the title of Old Timbertoes. The poultry had gone to roost; those of the pigs that were still awake were grunting very drowsily; the sweet-breathed cows were tranquilly chewing the cud upon their sides in their clean straw; but Jack, the donkey, was found to be still wide-awake enough to have a frolic with. The sudden ease with which he sent Percy flying over his ears rather lowered the young gentleman from town in the little country girls' estimation; but he redeemed his character by

demanding to be swung higher in the tithe-barn than the united strength of "the children" could send him. Of the mutual joy of Dick and Rover's meeting I have not spoken, because, as the French phrase it, that goes without saying; and the little black and tan terrier, appropriately christened "Snap," but almost as often answering to his nickname of "Burnt Gingerbread," had been one of the first to welcome his young master home, yelping and rushing at Dick's ankles as if he wanted to worry and then make a meal of them. In those days, after a substantial tea in the country, a substantial supper was always thought necessary. After supper "the children" were allowed to stay up rather too late in Lily's opinion; but Dick and Percy were recounting in turn their wonderful adventures, papa and mamma being as interested as any of their audience in the narrative. When the little fellows retired to their snug little double-bedded room, they considered themselves to be almost as famous as the great men with whom they were only vaguely acquainted as "the heroes of antiquity."

Of the happy week of holiday to which they woke next morning I cannot, of course, give a full account. St. Michael and All Angels were the patron saints of the first day, and a service was held in their honour in the little ivy-clad old church; but roast goose seemed to be the real object of worship of the sprinkling of farmers' families who attended it, anxiously hoping that their divinity might not come to grief in their absence; and to a fanciful mind it might have seemed that an incense of sage and onions floated between the crumbling grey arches and the worn grey floor. The vicarage goose was a splendid fellow—more like a young pterodactyl—that would have worn a rosette upon his breast had he found his way to Leadenhall; and you may be sure that the boys (and for the matter of that, the girls too, not excluding the matronly Lily) did ample justice to both goose and sauce—the latter made from apples gathered in the vicarage orchard, just as the bird had been fattened on its glebe. That orchard seemed to Percy, who had the run of it, an improved Paradise, since it held no forbidden fruit. The trees were all before him, free to choose pearmains or pippins, rennets or russets, jargonelle pears that melted in the mouth, rotten-ripe medlars, damsons and bullaces. Then there was the fun of joining in the general walnut gathering, with its congenial climbing up of ladders and beating

of boughs; and hazel-nuts were still to be found in the copse, blackberries on the hedges, and filberts in the garden, where plums



"Once or twice the vicar let each of them fire his gun, steadying it for them on his arm."

also lingered, and out-of-door grapes were ripening on the south gable-end of the purple-mottled red vicarage. One day the vicar

took the boys out partridge-shooting with him, and very proud they were as they strode through the stubble, and thought of what they would have to tell their schoolfellows when they got back. At least they went out to see the vicar shoot partridges, and once or twice he let each of them fire his gun, steadying it for them on his arm. They did not hit anything, and indeed, I am not sure that they really aimed at anything. Merely to have fired off a real fowling-piece was, they thought, a manly deed, even though they did shut their eyes when the gun went off, and jump back as if it had kicked very hard.

Another day the vicar borrowed a horse, and had it put into the chaise-cart, and in that driven by John, and the chaise driven by himself, the vicarage party went into the next county to a friend's, where hop-picking was going on. A very pleasant ride of four or five miles it was, under tall beech-trees, whose leaves were turning reddish-yellow, though scarcely one of them had fallen. On one side of the way wheat was being sown in broadcast handfuls; on the other beans, black as if they had been burnt, were being harvested. Starlings were mustering on the sunny slopes of the downs, and crested lapwings in the marsh, to which the snipe had come back, just as swallows and martins were swarming about the tower of Foxearth Church, and the horses' hoofs started great flocks of linnets.

When they reached his friend's, and had had luncheon, Mr. Abbott and his party turned out into the hop-field. There were some two hundred people in it—men, women, and children, countryfolk, and townsfolk in very uncountry-like and miscellaneous attire. The pickers, laughing, talking, joking, but always keeping their fingers as well as their tongues going, were clustered about canvas or sacking bins, which the bin-men assiduously fed with long plucked-up poles, buried in bines of vine-like leaves and aromatic blossoms. It was a calm, bright, warm day; the pickers were as contented as pickers ever are with the number of bushels to the shilling they had to tally, and therefore only good-naturedly chaffed the man who came round to measure their pickings before they were carried to the red and grey oast-houses, whose white night-caps showed above the orchard-trees. Of course the pickers very gladly accepted the aid of the lady and gentleman volunteers, who gave it now to this bin and now to that, simply caution-

ing them not to pick leaves instead of flowers; and since the picking finished off with a half-picnic early dinner on the sunny grass-plat in front of the vicar's friend's house, the boys had another jolly day.

But now I have to tell you of another adventure, which led to yet another before Dick and Percy went back to Brackenbury.

They and "the children" had gone into a wood on one of Annie's "finding" expeditions. It was worth going into, if only to see its funguses—very different from the mushrooms which pearl-buttoned the downs: big and little, ball-shaped, stool-shaped, table-shaped, white, scarlet, brown, yellow, spotted, and rose-pink. Percy tasted the crab-apples—or rather one of them—which he came upon in the wood. He did not think so much of them as he had done of his orchard apples. He threw down the one he had bitten, almost as soon as his teeth went into it, screwing up his eyelids as if the sourness were driving his eyes out of the back of his head. Nevertheless, calling them "little wild plums," he ventured to try a sample of sloes—and then declared that his lips and tongue and the roof of his mouth were turned to leather. After this he left, except the blackberries, wild fruit and berries alone—elderberries, hips, haws, black privet berries, bryony berries beginning to turn scarlet, wild bullaces, black buckthorn, scarlet and black mealy guelder-rose berries, night-shade, mountain ash berries, brown wild service-berries, waxy honeysuckle berries. Here and there honeysuckle was flowering for the second time, the autumn crocus thrust up its purple head between the still fresh green grass-blades and dry brown dead leaves, and where the wood opened into glades, saffron butterflies were fluttering about on golden wings; and the little naturalists were gratified by the sight of a couple of ring-ousels feasting on berries, and a flycatcher pouncing on its prey like a spider.

They saw another sight which did not please them so much—coming suddenly upon a number of gipsies basking in a sunny hollow. Little Susie had always been afraid of gipsies, and ever since they had carried off her brother she had looked upon them as demons incarnate. So she gave a little scream and ran away as fast as her trembling little legs would carry her. Even brave Annie ran away—as she said, to take care of Susie. Percy and Dick ran also—as they said, to look after the girls. The

children were chased a little way, but escaped with no great difficulty.

When Mr. Abbott, who, for his little boy's sake, bore gipsies no good-will, heard that they were prowling about so near his home, he was very much annoyed.

He was a J.P., and the next morning he rode over to visit his brother magistrate, the owner of the wood in which the gipsies had squatted; but from which the two gentlemen between them made the gipsies clear out—with sullen growls and savage side-long looks.

XV.

It was the night before Dick and Percy were to go back to Brackenbury, and there was sitting up late at Foxearth Vicarage, both in the parlour and in the kitchen.

The talk in the kitchen had turned upon the gipsies, of whom all kinds of unfavourable stories had got about since they had been compelled to move on. One gipsy fellow had undertaken to do half-a-day's work for the blacksmith, as his journeyman was laid up, had got his money advanced in half-an-hour's time, and then, as soon as the blacksmith's back was turned, had walked off with his best sledge-hammer. Another had got £20 from Farmer Blunt for a colt that was only fit for cats'-meat. Goody Phunk had been taken ill as soon as she had tasted the greens she boiled in the saucepan another gipsy mended; and Mrs. Brown, next door to Goody, had bought a jug of the gipsies which went all to pieces the very moment warm water—not so very hot, after all—was poured into it. Three sheep had died suddenly at Lambren Farm, and the farmer had been fool enough to let the gipsies, who no doubt had killed them, have them for carrion, while all the while they were good mutton; though, if they had been carrion, the nasty beasts would have eaten them all the same. If the carpenter hadn't happened to come by, a gipsy woman would have kidnapped little Prissy Plum—she'd lured the poor child to the finger-post pointing down the bridle-path through the High Woods. Just see what the wretches had had the impudence to do to Master Dick and the other young gentleman. The woman that told Mrs. Quick's girls their fortunes when their missis was out at a party, had stolen ever so many of the spoons—the big gravy spoon

among 'em, that Mrs. Quick had had give her at her wedding. Just hadn't there been a nice to do about it? It was a wonder the woman hadn't carried off the whole plate-basket. And that very morning, too, she had been at the house before and bewitched Mrs. Quick's poor old mother, who was sitting in the sunshine doing nothing, as harmless as a babe, poor old creature! bewitched her with the evil eye she had, just because Mrs. Quick had spoke sharp to her and bid her be off about her business, if she'd got e'er an honest one to go to. It was a shame, it was, such things should be let to be in a Christian land, but what did the gipsies care for churches? It was the devil they worshipped if they worshipped anybody. Put them in a rage, and they'd as soon stab a man as look at him; or, without a mite of provocation, if they met any one alone in a quiet lane, they'd clap a pitch-plaister over his mouth and sell his corpse to the doctors. It was well known, too, the gipsies did most of the body-snatching. The doctors ought to be ashamed of themselves, they did.

Each kitchen narrative heaped some fresh charge upon the gipsies. They'd a great name as bruisers, but they didn't fight fair, and if they got the worst of it they bore malice for months and years, until they had done some bad turn to the man who had licked them. It was not hen-roosts only they robbed—they broke into houses. In one place in which she had lived, said cook, she had gone down to draw her supper beer, when, what do you think? She saw a gipsy with a carving knife in his hand, curled up behind the cask. Just didn't she scream when he rushed at her! And didn't she run up the steps and clap down the cellar-flap with a bang, and flop down upon it, too, though she was afraid the villain might prod her through the boards? But it was no use. When the master came and went down at last—he was a deal more scared than she was—he could not find anyone. The scoundrel had gone through the brick walls like a ghost, or wriggled between iron bars where there was scarce room for a rabbit to squeeze. Her master ought to have given her something handsome, he ought, for if she had not found out the scamp they might all have been murdered in their beds that night. But the master never did, and tried to make out that there hadn't been anybody there—that it was all her fancy and nervousness. Nerves, indeed! when it was plain to see that he was a deal more nervous

than she was. What was the good of his talking about getting by the dog, when it was well known that gipsies could quiet the savagest brute that ever wore a collar? And so she had told him. She couldn't bear such ways, not she—men pretending to be so brave and wise, and making out that women were a pack of cowardly fools, when really it was all the other way.

John, who did not side with cook in her estimate of the comparative valour of the two sexes, capped her story by telling one about a former master of his, a land agent, who, riding home with a good deal of money about him, was suddenly set upon, although it was moonlight, by five gipsies, in a narrow lane, three of them leaping out of one ditch and two out of the other. He pulled out a pistol, but they knocked it out of his hand, and before he could reach over to the other holster they had dragged him off the horse and away it went at full gallop. Then the five set on the land-agent; and though he showed good fight, they got him down, and beat him about the head with their hedgestakes until he was stupid—at any rate they thought so, but when he had found it was no use to fight he had given in, and pretended to be done for. So he lay quite still while they robbed him of his money and his watch and chain and seals and the diamond pin he wore in his shirt-front and the gold links out of his wrist-bands. Then they rolled him into one of the ditches and set off. But they had made so sure that they had stunned him, if not killed him downright, that they had let out in his hearing where they meant to hide that night. As soon as they were clear off, the murdered man got out of the ditch and stretched himself, and then he went to the nearest farm-house, and there and at another farmhouse he roused up some men and led them to a lonely old shed in a hollow, where they caught the gipsies snuggling off to sleep. "And so," said John, "they were tried, and all sent across the water for life, and master got his money and the rest of the things back, and the horse had galloped straight home."

This seemed rather a tame wind-up to the housemaid, who would have liked to hear that the five gipsies had all been hanged. Not having any stories of her own to relate, she tried to bring back the conversation to thrilling pitch by saying that she had heard that gipsies were great fire-raisers, and wondering whether there was any chance of this Foxearth gang burning the vicarage folk alive,

because master had offended them; cook, for excitement's sake, seemed disposed to entertain the supposition with gloomy satisfaction, but John knocked it on the head.

"It's ricks the gipsies burn," he said; "and they know master's let the glebe—bless you, they know everything!—and so that they wouldn't be spiting him if they were to fire Mr. Jackson's corn."

So the talk went on in the kitchen, and I think that it was livelier than that in the parlour. The treat of "sitting up" had lost something of its novelty, and although this was a later sitting up than any before, yet, for that very reason, it seemed to bring going back to school next day all the nearer; and the "children" somehow had great difficulty in finding anything to talk about, and the elders, motherly Lily included, were getting sleepy.

At last the conversation happened to turn on an election that was soon to come off at Brackenbury. The Abbotts and the Sharpes were Blues, and Miss Lamblion was really a thorough Blue in attachment to all things established; but at the forthcoming election a cousin of hers, who had helped her to make dolls' clothes when they both were young, a barrister, Mr. Sergeant Jollyboy, was going to stand for the town in the Yellow interest; and so remembrance of her cousin's past and pride in his present had made Miss Lamblion suddenly bloom or blaze out as broadly Yellow as a sunflower. Not being able to address the electors, she had relieved her feelings by addressing her little boys, down—down—downing with Despotism and lauding Liberalism to the skies. Mr. Abbott laughed heartily when he heard this, and told the boys that they must mind to stick to their colours, prove a brace of Blue Abdiels, if all the rest of the school should turn recreant. Of course Dick and Percy both vowed valiantly that they would never be faithless.

So the chat was going on, when presently Mrs. Abbott said, "Well, but, young gentlemen, instead of talking about going to the poll, it is time we were thinking of going to bed. It is getting terribly late, and we all look as if we could scarcely keep our eyes open."

She went to a window, and to make sure that it had been fastened, re-opened the shutter. There was no drowsiness after that. The tithe-barn was on fire. Out rushed Mr. Abbott,

followed by John, startled by his master's rocket-like rush through the kitchen. The first thing Mrs. Abbott had to do was to quiet the screams of the cook and housemaid; then she set the two little boys to ring the alarm-bell, and held herself and her daughters in readiness to do anything to which they could best put their hands.

The flames began to roar, but loud above the roar rang out the hurried peal of the alarm bell. Still, before the startled villagers could partially get their wits together, shuffle on their clothes, and hurry up to the vicarage, the fate of the tithe-barn was sealed. A fire-engine could not have saved it. Its blaze made the old church stand out almost as plain as by daylight. Scores of startled birds whirred out of the ivy, and many of them flew into and fell in the flames. Poor Annie could scarcely be kept from rushing into the fire to rescue the menagerie—the whole of which perished. Snap was rushing about, barking frantically; but where was Rover? He lay quite still before his kennel—poisoned.

Moreover the premises had been fired in many places. Tongues of flame licked about the out-houses; the thatch of the summer-house burst into a blaze,—fire was running along the tarred fences leading to the house.

The neighbours, working with a will when they had been got thoroughly awake and in hand, Mr. Abbott saved his house. He saved Floss also; though, even when they had blindfolded her, it was as much as he and John could do to get her out into the glaring yard. The chaise was burnt, and so were a cow and some of the poultry. Jack escaped.

Things might have been very much worse, but still that was a doleful way to finish a holiday. When the fire had been quite got under and the neighbours had gone away, the vicarage people got a little sleep. When they were up again, not much refreshed, even after their baths—their eyes still smarting and their skin still seeming smoke-dried,—they had a nondescript meal, a mixture of breakfast, luncheon, and dinner; and then in the afternoon John drove the two little boys into Brackenbury in a chaise-cart instead of a chaise.

The fire had done this good at any rate,—the "children" left at Foxearth, and the "children" returning to school, did not feel, through having something out of the ordinary way to think

of, their parting as much as they would otherwise have done.

Dick and Percy were welcomed back to school very kindly by both mistresses and mates; and the fire of which they had to tell kept up their reputation as adventurous heroes, to whom, everywhere and always, something out of the common was sure to happen. When Mrs. Buskitt, on whom Dick had called on his way to school, to give an order from his father to old Peters, heard what had happened to the two boys during their holidays, she was more than ever convinced that they were destined to be Lord Chancellors or Archbishops of Canterbury.

Shortly after their return to school, moreover, Miss Knight gave them a second invitation to spend an afternoon with her, and she and her maidens, Tryphena and Tryphosa, whose lives were not often ruffled by excitement, were, in their quiet way, so delighted to hear from eye-witnesses of the "startling conflagration," an account of which they had read in the county paper, that Dick and Percy really began to think that they must have done something very brave in tugging away at the bell-rope.

But at Miss Knight's, too, the election—which soon, so to speak, put out the fire—was, as everywhere else, a subject for conversation. Miss Knight wished for the triumph of Yellow principles, but hoped that the Yellow mob would be better managed than it had been on the occasion of the last election, when, she said, it was more drunken than the Blue, and, mistaking her for the Mayor, had been with difficulty prevented from breaking into her grounds and smashing her windows. Although heartily desiring Mr. Jollyboy's return, Miss Knight did not approve of his cousin's advocacy of his claims. It appeared unseemly, she said, nay, some might call it likely to provoke mirth; which was very satirical blame from Miss Knight's gentle lips.

But Miss Lamblion, who did not know what Miss Knight said, and if she had known wouldn't have cared, went on making speeches to her boys, most of whom, even though they knew their fathers meant to vote Blue, professed to be ardent Yellows. Blue parents respected the good lady too much as a schoolmistress to take offence at her sudden appearance as a politician of opposite principles. Her electioneering eccentricities, in Miss Knight's phrase, provoked mirth merely. On nomination day she assembled

her boys at her front windows to cheer the Yellow procession when it marched by with flaunting brimstone banners and braying brass bands. The boys cheered lustily. Mr. Serjeant Jollyboy, who was riding at the head of the procession in a lemon-coloured carriage, drawn by four chestnut horses decked with buff favours and yellow dahlias, took off his white hat and gave the school-house two special bows, one for the cheerers and the other for his cousin the mistress, who wore a bunch of his colours like a small sheaf of corn. But unfortunately it is in the nature of boys to cheer everything that includes noise, and Miss Lamblion's pupils greeted the Blue procession as heartily as they had sped its predecessor on its way. After that they were withdrawn from the front and had to listen to another harangue, Miss Lamblion being too agitated to settle down to ordinary school business.

She talked about Harmodius and Aristogiton and the Tarquins and the days of her youth, and called for a show of hands in favour of her cousin. Up went Miss Quinciner's, who wore yellow favours almost bigger than her principal's. Up went those of all the boys (even—alas, that I should have to write it !—Percy's) —all, except Dick's.

"All, all!" exclaimed Miss Lamblion, as delighted as if it had been a genuine, unbiassed show of hands and her cousin's return had been secured.

But to make sure she went on, taking her quotations as usual from "Enfield's Speaker." "Who is here so base that would be a Blue bondman? If any, speak, for him have I offended. Let him speak out. Who is here so rude that would not be a Yellow? If any, speak, for him have I offended. Who is here so vile that he would vote for Oldport? If any, speak, for him have I offended. Let him hold up his hand. I pause for a reply."

It was a trying moment for Dick; but the eyes of Miss Carter were on him, and he knew that she was a true Blue at heart. He thought, too, of what his father had said, and determined that although Percy had shirked, there should be one Blue Abdiel. Up went his hand, and down on him came a boiling shower-bath of denunciation as a "minion of tyranny," and I don't know what all, for the excitement of the election had mastered good, hot-tempered Miss Lamblion's ordinary excellent common-sense. However,

Dick was neither scalded nor drowned. Miss Carter gave him a smile. Percy looked very much ashamed of himself. Some of

"Mr. Jollyboy took off his hat, and gave the schoolhouse two special bows."

the other fellows afterwards praised Dick's pluck, and said they would have done the same—only, etc., etc. Altogether Dick was

proud of himself, and although, as a rule, he hated long letters, he wrote home a full account of his heroism.

That Brackenbury election was not a lucky one for the Yellow party. Its band was hopelessly drunk before serious operations began. One of its leading members became so bewildered that he hired a horse, and escorted the wrong candidate into the town, getting his windows broken by both mobs for his pains; and the final state of the poll was as follows:—

Oldport	972
Jollyboy	532

Miss Lamblion, of course, lamented the defeat of her cousin, who had prophetically indicated his fitness in mature age to help to make Acts of Parliament by helping her in early life to make dolls' clothes; but when she came to her right mind again she did not think any the worse of Dick for having voted Blue against such odds.

XVI.

BRACKENBURY has an old abbey. There was not very much left of it when Dick went to school at Miss Lamblion's—a gateway, and some gapped grey flint walls eight feet thick and once half-a-mile round. Thanks to Miss Quinciner, Miss Lamblion's boys looked upon this fragmentary abbey as a great nuisance. They could never go near it when under Miss Quinciner's charge without being obliged to go through a Supplement to "Mangnall's Questions," which she had composed, and of which she was very proud:—

"Who built Brackenbury Abbey?

"Henry I., surnamed Beauclerc, on account of his great learning, who was buried there.

"Why did he build it?

"Because he had put out his brother's eyes.

"What was the cause of Henry I.'s death?

"A broken heart, accelerated by a surfeit of lampreys.

"What else do you know of Brackenbury Abbey?

"Henry VIII. hanged the last abbot because he would not do as he was bid."

That might be all that Miss Quinciner knew of Brackenbury

Abbey; but there was a legend concerning it, of which the boys had got hold, and which, through frequent telling by their narrators of stories in bed, had got shaped into somewhat of the following fashion:—

"Once upon a time there was a great lord, and his wife told him lies about his cousin; so he had his cousin tied up naked by the thumbs, and then flogged with whips, with lashes made of knotted wire, so that the blood run down to his heels and made a great puddle on the floor; and then the lord had chains put on his cousin, so heavy that he could scarcely move an inch, and cast him for life into a dark, miry dungeon, full of snakes and toads, where he only gave him just enough mouldy bread and stinking ditch-water to keep him from dying. But after ten years he did die.

"A Saint had appeared to the lord, and told him to let his cousin go free, but he said he wouldn't. Instead of that he went and robbed the abbey that had been built in honour of the Saint; and the abbott said, 'Thou hast robbed St. Edmund: may his curse rest upon thee, thou wicked man!'

"The lord didn't care, but went on being wicked. And yet he was a coward. He was the king's standard-bearer; and in a fight with the Welsh he flung down the flag and ran away. When the war was over, another nobleman called the lord a coward, so they fought a duel close by Brackenbury. The king came to see the fight, and lords and ladies from all parts of the country, and everybody in Brackenbury that was able to walk. They climbed up trees and chimneys to get a good view.

"The other nobleman soon had the best of it; but they say he wouldn't have licked so easily if the lord hadn't seen St. Edmund and his cousin hovering in the air in golden armour ten times as big as when they were alive, both frowning and shaking their fists at him. Then he shut his eyes, and made one charge, like a mad bull; but he was killed. At least, so everybody thought, but when his friends carried him into Brackenbury Abbey to bury him he came to life again. So he became a monk, and did die and get buried at last there; but St. Edmund had never forgiven him, so he can't rest, but walks—especially on the night of St. Edmund's Day, that's the 20th of November. Old Peter says that in his grandmother's time it was quite common to see the ghost if anybody went into the abbey alone after nightfall."

His Shum experiences had greatly shaken Dick's faith in ghosts of his own time, but ghosts visible in old Peter's grandmother's were different things. One day when Miss Quinciner had finished her Supplement to Mangnall, as she sat with the boys unwillingly gathered about her on the seat that runs, or used to run, round the big tree-stump covered with a metal plate upon the Forbury Mound, Dick asked the second mistress whether it was true about the abbey ghost. Miss Quinciner, who had never heard the story before, for that, if for no other reason, declared the legend to be silly nonsense when she *had* heard it. Could any minutest scrap of authentic history have escaped her omniscient ken? When Dick referred to old Peters as a very respectable authority, Miss Quinciner, tossing up her head with a scornful little titter, begged him not to mention "so vulgar and illiterate a personage." In all knowledge outside the meagre little schoolbooks of the time, the old fisherman was vastly Miss Quinciner's superior; whilst as to vulgarity,—her standard, in spite of her mincing talk about the superiority of refined poverty to vulgar affluence, being really the money one,—he could have brought up herself and her family for many unrecorded generations. However, from the height of her "professional" status Miss Quinciner chose to look down on a "mere tradesman."

In consideration, I suppose, of the adventures they had experienced, Dick and Percy were now allowed, occasionally, to go into the town together, or by themselves, just as if they had been big fellows. On one of these occasions, shortly after the chat about the ghost on the Forbury, they paid their friend Mrs. Buskitt a visit, and old Peters happening to be at home, Master Dick, from monkeyish love of making mischief, told him of the small esteem in which Miss Quinciner held him.

Mrs. Buskitt was highly indignant. "The stuck-up old maid!" she exclaimed. "Why her grandmother was glad enough to get my grandmother's washing to do."

But old Peters was only amused. "Nay, lass," he said, "that's being as silly as the poor old woman." (If Miss Quinciner could have heard the "mere tradesman" presuming to call her a mere poor, silly old woman, even her detestation of hurry, as so very ungenteel, could scarcely have prevented her from flying at him to scratch his eyes out, or at Mrs. Buskitt, to pull out the luxuriant

hair coiled under her natty widow's cap. Perhaps, since Miss Quinciner wore fronts, injudiciously suffering her holiday and Sunday hair to be of a more juvenile hue than that of her ordinary week-day scholastic life, Mrs. Buskitt's natural locks would have been the first object of her attack, although in the daughter she would have found a more doughty antagonist than, womanwards, the father would have proved.) "That's as bad," old Peters went on, "as the larned lady herself, judgin' folk by them that came afore 'em, and the show they make, instead o' the stuff they've got in 'em themselves. Your schoolmissis, Miss Lamblion, now, young gentlemen, ain't one o' that sort. She's a sensible woman, she is, though I do hear she warn't overwise at election time. Her father, and his afore him, were as Blue as the sea; so it did seem silly-like for her, as hadn't got a vote, to be making a Yaller exhibition of herself, and her boys too,—agin' their parents' wishes, I'll go bail,—just because her cousin chose to make an ass of himself by puttin' up agin' Mr. Oldport. Both he and she's old enough to know better. Though now he's lost the 'lection—as anybody with half an eye might ha' seen he would—I don't mind sayin' that Jollyboy ain't a bad feller. His friends—nice friends!—must ha' got on the blind side of him; else, instead o' losin' the seat he'd ha' saved his money by not tryin' for it. And yet they say he's very clever at the law, and he's a keen angler, too. When he's down here in what they call the vacation, he's always at it, and at 'size time too, when the courts has risen.

"That reminds me," said Peters, who perhaps began to think that he had spoken too freely of Miss Lamblion and her cousin before her pupils—"that reminds me, Master Abbott. My daughter tells me that you bought a rod and line here, but I never see you making any use of 'em. To-morrow's your half-holiday, ain't it? Well, if you can get leave—yes, you and your young friend too—I'll take you out with me. I'm only going to potter about in my punt after dinner. Mayhap, if it's wet, we shall be able to catch some barbel, though it'll be rather early in the day for 'em."

The day was neither foul nor fair, so what their chance of catching barbel might be the boys did not know; but it was not for catching barbel or seeing it caught that they cared so much as for the distinguished honour of going out fishing, and afloat too, with a veteran angler like Peters. If Fred Shum had still been at

school when they got leave to go, he would almost have shrivelled up with envy.

In their flat-bottomed barge they poled and paddled and loitered in the most likely places, but not a barbel could even the experienced Peters catch. Worms, greaves, paste, he used, but all in vain.

"There is no accounting for it," he oracularly remarked; "but sometimes fish *won't* bite. Now, how should you account for it, young gentlemen?"

Dick, who had heard a similar remark made about the won't-biting before, began to speculate as to whether Fred Shum was so bad an angler as he had thought him, or whether Peters, after all, was so good a one. Percy answered, "I suppose either they ain't hungry, or else they can see you want to catch them, and they prefer safety to sweet things, like the goat in the fable book."

"Well, I suppose it must be one or the other," said Peters, laughing; "but then you see it ain't satisfactory when you can't tell which. Easy enough barbel are to be caught sometimes. When the cold has numbed 'em a bit you can push 'em into a net as if you was packing a portmanteau, or let a lead, with hooks round it, down on 'em when they are lying at the bottom, and haul 'em up that fashion, though you can't call such sort o' work fair fishing. Indeed, I don't know that there's much sport in any kind of barbel catching." [" Perhaps the grapes are sour," Dick was rude enough to whisper to Percy.] "Anyhow, they ain't much good when they're caught. You've to stew such a lot of things with 'em to make 'em tasty. It's like the chap that said he could make capital broth out of a stone, and so he did, by borrowing a lot more things to put in with it.—Hullo! here's a bite at last," and in a short time the old man pulled up a big barbel.

"There's a fine handsome fellow!" he cried, forgetting how very lately he had been disparaging the fish. "Four pound, and more, he must weigh. If you can stay we'll have him stewed for supper, or else grill him; and you won't turn up your noses at him, either, young gentlemen. Now, can either of you tell me why they're called barbel?"

"I suppose because they look as if they wanted the barber," answered Percy, pointing to the things hanging from the fish's mouth.

"Well, you're about right," said the old man. "Anyhow, I've read in one of my books that the name comes from the Latin word that means beard."

"Oh, I know that," cut in Dick. "*Barba, barbæ,*—noun of the first declension, feminine gender."

"May be, may be not, for anything I know," replied old Peters, as if the declension and gender of *barba* were quite open questions. "But it seems to me it would have been more to the purpose if you could have told at once how the fish got its name. Hows'ever, I've heard that they never teach anything that's of use to anybody at the gentlefolk's schools—they're only fit for the charity brats. Your fine friend, Miss Quinciner, would think 'em vulgar, wouldn't she, Master Abbott?"

No more barbel were caught, but the boys, to their great delight, caught a roach apiece. Peters caught a basketful; but when he tried for chub he was not even as lucky as he had been with the barbel; not one could he catch.

"Well, people may talk as they like," he growled; "I believe there *is* luck in fishing. These roach were ready enough to bite——"

"But people ain't always all hungry at the same time, so perhaps all fish mayn't be," suggested Dick; "or, perhaps——"

"Perhaps what?"

"Perhaps people can't always fish as well as——"

"You're a young saucebox," answered the old man, grinning instead of growling. "It's time we were going home, or else you'll catch something when you get back to school you'll not be so proud of as you are of that fish you caught more by good luck than good management. How often does your schoolmissis flog you? Not half as often as you deserve, I'll be bound to say."

"Oh, Miss Lamblion don't often flog," said Percy.

"Then she ain't fit to be schoolmissis to young limbs like you," replied the old man. "What does she do, then—box your ears?"

"Sometimes."

"Hard?"

"*Rather,*" answered Dick this time, screwing up his face into a comical expression; his own ears having been operated on that very morning. The crime of firing potato pellets from a quill popgun during school-time had brought down this punishment

upon him. One of the pellets, aimed at a boy standing up in class before Miss Quinciner's desk, had overshot its mark and mashed itself upon the keystone of the arch of that lady's nose, and she, thinking no punishment in her power to inflict condign for such an offence, had reported the culprit to her principal.

"*Rather*," answered Dick; "but though it comes down heavy while it lasts, it's soon over, like rain in a thunderstorm."

"Talking of rain," said the old man, who had looked back at the sky, "you two young gentlemen will get drenched, and then your schoolmissis will say it was my fault, if you go on spooning the batter in that lazy fashion. Here, let me have the oars."

Under the old man's pull the punt went a good deal faster and straighter than it had gone before; but it had not gone far before down came the rain in a deluge. Accordingly, old Peters—startling a dusky moorhen which had been cruising about, nid-nodding, but suddenly went down like a stone—poled the punt over the broad water-lily leaves and between the yellowing spiked bulrushes into the shelter of a willow which dipped its branches into the stream. Some rain found its way into this leafy bower, pattering on the punt and pitting the water around, but nothing like the downfall outside.

In this comparative shelter, to pass away the time, the rods were got out again—or rather the top-joints of them—and some fish were caught. The anglers, therefore, did not heed the rain which forced its way into their retreat, ringed round with flowerless flowering rushes, cornflags whose yellow blossoms had fallen or faded, and arrowhead with a few lingering fresh panicles of pinkish-white.

As the rain, however, gave no sign of ceasing, old Peters at last advised the boys to make a short cut into the town across the meadows, instead of waiting to return with him in the punt. "The river winds so," he said; "you'll get back in half the time that way. Run to my house and get a dry, and my daughter will give you something to warm your insides, too. I'll take care of your fish and your tackle. You'll have time to wait till I get home, and then if the weather don't hold up by that time, I can lend you a gig umbrella big enough to cover a dozen such shrimps as you."

The boys jumped ashore, and were clambering up the bank, when some one running to take shelter, from the land side, under

"The rods were got out again, and some fish were caught."

the willow, came against Dick—with such force, that he was knocked down and rolled into the river.

XVII.

It was "the Professor," who had been caught by the rain while taking a country walk, and had run for shelter, that had pushed Dick into the water. The Professor was *en désespoir* when he found what he had done, and learnt from Percy who it was that had got a ducking. He took for granted that Dick was drowned, and began to pull at his lanky, but by no means abundant, locks, as if he wanted to make the sides of his head as bald as the dome, which seemed made of knobby ivory. He pulled at his cravat, too, and, had it not been made limp by the wet, he would have torn the two ends in two in his distress, as Orientals express their sorrow by rending their garments. And as he pulled, he moaned, "Poor lee-tell boy! *Mon élève!* My lee-tell pewpeel!"

"Ah, that makes it worse, don't it, sir?" said old Peters with a grin, as he fished Dick out. "Hows'ever, I don't think there's much harm done, is there, young squire?"

As Dick had scarcely gone under before he was out again, very little harm *had* been done.

"Well," continued Peters, as he helped Dick ashore, "it would be hard for you to get wetter than you are, Master Dick; so cut away with your little friend to my place, as I was telling you afore. And if I was you, sir," he added to his neighbour, the Professor, "I should make the best of my way back to Minster Street, too. It's coming on heavier, and will soon drench you here. Besides, the rain has set in for the night. If you like I'll pull you back in the punt, but it'll be a shower-bath all the way. As for me, it don't matter. I don't care no more for wet than a duck or a fish. Like it rather—'tis my natur' to, pretty nigh as much as theirn. When my daughter's knittin' my stockuns, she axes me how many extra stitches she should put in to allow for my being web-footed. You'd better be off, sir, with the boys—young gen'lemen, though, I ought to say, Master Dick—I beg Miss Quinciner's pardon."

Accordingly, the Professor, Percy, and Dick sped across the meadows, the Professor insisting upon taking his pupils' hands, although they could have got on far better without him,—indeed, they had to drag him along like two little tugs towing a clumsy merchant-vessel, for ever "yawing" out of her course.

On reaching Minster Street the Professor would not hear of their going to old Peters's, where the dripping flat gold fish was being dashed about by the pelting rain at such a rate that it seemed to be alive,—just hooked, and struggling to get free. He pointed out that his landlady, being the mother of a brood of boys, could supply them with suitable clothing while their own was being dried, whereas the *pantalon* of M. Peter would swallow up much of lee-tell-boy, and Madame Buskeet, *veuve*, could give no help in this matter although *très-spirituelle*, and he had heard that she "did vear vat you call de breech," when her husband was alive.

So to his lodgings the Professor carried his young friends, and Mrs. Mace, the good woman of the house, very willingly consented to lend them dry clothes, and get tea ready for them at once,—all the more willingly because Miss Lamblion had recently begun to order some of her groceries from Mr. Mace.

"There, sir," said Mr. Mace's wife to the Professor, "you leave the young gentlemen to me, I'll take care of them, and you go and shift yourself, or I shall be having you laid up; you can't have a dry thread to your back."

In the matter of meals, the Professor had adapted himself to English customs, except that not only at breakfast, but also at what he called his tea, he drank coffee. Mrs. Mace, however, had provided tea for the boys, and, in obedience to the Professor (who was only niggardly in the matter of refreshments at his "assemblies"), a much more substantial and varied repast in the way of eatables than he usually took in the evening.

As Percy and Dick, clad in the dry stockings and Sunday-best suits of two of the Masters Mace, and the Professor in a faded flowered dressing-gown and well-worn, once red morocco slippers, were enjoying their freshening, warming meal, Mrs. Mace came into the room, and said that the cart was just going out and would have to pass Miss Lamblion's—was there any message? To the delight of the boys, a sudden inspiration seized the Professor. Having inquired of Mrs. Mace whether she could give the boys a bed, and been answered in the affirmative, he went to a side-table and wrote a note to their schoolmistress, relating what had happened, informing her that, as the rain still fell in torrents, he had taken upon himself the responsibility of

keeping them with him for the night, and promising that they should be back next day in good time for morning school.

When this note had been despatched, Dick felt quite grateful to the Professor for knocking him into the river. In the evening both he and Percy were astonished to find how the Professor could unbend. Dancing he looked upon as the great business of life, and therefore taught that accomplishment in a severely solemn manner befitting its dignity; but relieved from professional cares and playing host to two pupils, one of whom had made him very grateful by not getting drowned, the Professor became quite frolicsome. He joined in all the games the boys suggested, and taught them fresh ones of his own; he got out the cards and told the boys their fortunes, he played conjurer's tricks, he sang a French song, at which Percy and Dick began to laugh as very funny, until they found out by his look that it was meant to be very sad, and then, after a snug little supper, he told them stories,—amongst others, some that he had made up rather than learnt, about the old house in which they were going to pass the night; and these were of the kind that makes you draw your chair nearer to the fire, and glance anxiously over your shoulder at the uneasy door.

When Mrs. Mace came to conduct the boys to the beds she had provided for them, they would much rather have remained on the Professor's hearth-rug, even at the risk of being made still more nervous by fresh tales of eerieness.

The boys' little bedroom was away from all others, cut off from the rest of the house by a longish passage, at the end of which was a door studded with tarnished brass nails, and partly covered with dim, dusty, mangy green baize. When Mrs. Mace closed this door with a bang,—or rather a gust of wind (for the house was very draughty) banged it,—Dick and Percy felt very isolated. It wasn't quite so bad as when they had been groping about in the subterranean passage, but they could not help thinking about that time.

In order that they might feel nearer to the rest of the household, they were half inclined at first to leave their door unlocked, but then the thought of the horrors, ghostly and corporeal, that might come out at midnight and prowl between them and the rest, made them change their minds. They locked their door, said their prayers, and got into bed, leaving their candle burning. But they

could not go to sleep, or if they did drop off, they would wake up in a minute or two, after a dream which seemed to have lasted a lifetime,—a dream so horrid that they shrank from the thought of going to sleep again and falling back into it. The excitement of the day, a rather heavy supper, their unfamiliar bedroom, and the unextinguished light had something to do with this, and so, too, had the state of the weather.

The rain still poured down, beating against the windows of the upper floors of the house as if bent on smashing their diamond panes, and crumpling up their rattling leaden lattices; but the wind had risen, now howling, now wailing and moaning—especially in the chimney of the boys' room, whose fire-board it caused to belly almost as if made of canvas. The carpet rose and fell in little fast-running waves. The flame of the long-wicked candle flickered. The white dimity window-curtains were blown inwards. The rings of the bed-curtains clinked like castanets, chattered like teeth. The old house, which was largely built of wood, creaked, groaned, and shivered in the gale. When it lulled a little, the flapping of loose gates and doors and shutters could be heard above the roar of the rushing rain; but when the gale was at its height the last strokes of eleven could not be heard even from the clock of the nearest church. In another lull the yard-dog began to whine, although there was no moon to bay. Next there seemed to be heavy footsteps overhead, a scuffle, and the flinging down of furniture. As the boys raised themselves on their elbows to listen, off went the bedclothes—so suddenly that they seemed to have been pulled off, rather than to have slipped. Down came the fire-board with a bang, bringing with it the fire-irons clashing and clanging on the fender. Then Dick had to jump out of bed to keep a blown-in window-curtain from catching alight, and after that a sudden gust of wind blew out the candle.

Towards midnight the storm moderated. The rain pattered, instead of pelting, and the wind blew only in fitful puffs. Every stroke of twelve could be heard from more churches than one.

But still the little boys could not settle themselves off to sleep. Just after the clocks had finished striking twelve, they heard—there could be no doubt about it, in the comparative hush—footsteps coming stealthily along the passage, and presently yellow light glimmered through the keyhole of their door, and its handle

was tried. The start they gave made the curtain rings rattle, and they heard, to their great relief, the voice of the Professor inquiring, "Sleep you, my lee-tell boy?"

They jumped out of bed, and let him in—scented with very fragrant tobacco. Fearing to offend the noses of the fair portion of his connection,—for in those days Englishwomen did not tolerate smoking as they do nowadays, to say nothing of indulging in it themselves,—the Professor allowed himself only one cigar in the course of the twenty-four hours. He took care that this should be a prime one, and smoked it just before going to bed; afterwards, by the chewing of little silverfoil-covered aromatic pills and other expedients, doing his best to keep the fact of his midnight fumigation a secret from his pupils and their parents and principals. He explained that he had simply come to see that his little friends were all right, advised them to go to sleep at once, and told them that, if in the course of the night, or rather morning, they should hear any stir in the house, they need not disturb themselves, as it would only be caused by the arrival of Mr. Mace, who had gone to Bristol on business, and was expected home by the mail. He laughed when they asked him to relight their candle, but complied with their request. "Avez-vous peur, mes petits Anglais?" he said with somewhat of a sneer. "Good-night. Noting vill 'arm you."

In process of time the boys heard the horn of the mail-guard, the rattle of the coach-wheels, the clatter of the horses' hoofs upon the stones, and soon afterwards the little commotion which attends a traveller's arrival at home when all his neighbours have gone to bed, and a voice pitched at its usual key seems in the hush brutally bent on rousing them from their slumbers.

But ere long they heard more startling sounds—those of Mrs. Mace's voice exclaiming in terror, "Mr. Goutier, Mr. Goutier!" It was thus that she made a morbid English comparative of the name of Professor Gautier.

Soon there was a noise as if the Professor had huddled on his clothes and was hurrying downstairs to learn what was the matter.

The boys followed his example.

In the parlour behind the shop, where the table was laid for a very early breakfast or very late supper, they found the Professor looking very puzzled, Mr. Mace looking very pale, and Mrs.

Mace and her maidservant Molly in about an equal state of perturbation.

Since the shaft had been covered in, and holes in the walls stopped up, Mrs. Mace had made use of her cellar, and just before had sent down Molly to draw a jug of beer for her master. Molly had come back without the beer, and almost ready to faint with fright, declaring that just as she was going to turn the tap of the cask she had heard a low moaning, and had rushed upstairs. "It's fort'nit I hadn't turned it," she said; "for if I had, I was that skeared I couldn't have stayed to keep the beer from running to waste. It's a wonder I didn't let the jug drop."

"You'd have had to pay for it if you'd broke it, moanin' or no moanin'," had been the reply of Mrs. Mace, who prided herself on her skill in curing servants of what she believed to be their wilful waste of crockery. "Them that smashes, cashes." This last piece of poetry was of Mrs. Mace's own composing, and she was almost as proud of it as she was of the line of policy which it epigrammatically summarised.

Mr. and Mrs. Mace had then gone down into the cellar, Molly accompanying them, because she was afraid to be left behind by herself. All three had heard the low moaning, and now the Professor had been summoned to explore and, if possible, explain the mystery, and reassure by his presence the cowed grocer, groceress, and maiden. "The young men was no use," Mrs. Mace said in excuse. "Hen-hearted chaps! And so, Mr. Goutier, we made so bold. You've wriggled yourself—though how you'd the sperrit to do it, sir, I can't make out—through that dark underground place, and so, in course, you ain't afeared o' nothin'. My good man here's 'most as skeared as myself. What! you here, my dears?" she continued, noticing the two little boys. "Now that's queer, I call it. It was you that found out the nasty place, and now you're here again there's this noise—it's there it comes from. I did hope that I should be able to have the use of my cellar, for it's been free o' rats since we did the bricking-up and that. There was a strange cat that used to squeeze down through the grating and catch them, but there's none left for her to catch now, and so she's gone away. I haven't seen her this ever so long."

Each carrying a light, the whole party descended the cellar

steps, and proceeded to the stout planking with which the mouth of the shaft had been covered. There they halted, but nothing could they hear.

The Professor, standing on the planking, was beginning to explain, with much self-complacency, to Molly, her mistress, and her master, that they had been frightened by their own fancy, when from beneath his very feet there came a low moaning which made him jump as if he had trodden on a red-hot ploughshare, and sent the rest of the party scampering to the stair-foot.

But the Professor soon recovered his self-possession. His chivalrous feelings had been aroused.

"It is de voice of de lovly voman!" he shouted. "Com back, com back, M. Mace! *Au secours!*"

And so shouting he fell upon his knees and began to claw away at the planking, as if fingers only were needed to pull it up.

Mrs. Mace, followed by Molly, rushed upstairs, declaring that if it *was* a woman, it must be a witch, and that the best thing to do would be to keep her down there, if they could only manage it. "Run, my dears, or she may get you," she cried to the boys, but the boys lingered. Mr. Mace also lingered. He would have liked to run, but shame kept him in the cellar.

Fortunately fear had not deprived him of common sense.

"If there's anything to be done, Mr. Goutier," he grumbled, "it can't be done in that frantic fashion. I must get tools—though it seems a pity, don't it? to spoil a good piece o' carpentring that I'd to pay for just for my wife's satisfaction."

However, he did get tools, and the Professor made a dash at them. Seizing a saw in his left hand, and a hammer in his right, he began to ply them in a manner characterised rather by zeal than discretion. The grocer went to work in less "frantic fashion," and after a time made an opening in the planking, through which a lantern could be lowered, and observations taken.

And now, what was it in the power of the observers to declare?—that in the dim cellar they had heard a low moaning, and seen a bright woman surpassingly fair? Nothing so romantic. The Professor's "lovly voman" turned out to be a half-starved cat,—the stranger of which Mrs. Mace had spoken, and which must have got shut in with the rats, and then, when she had caught all that she could, and begun to feel the pangs of hunger with nothing

to satisfy it, must have used up the remnants of her strength in forcing her way through the imperfectly set brick and mortar which blocked the entrance to the subterranean passage.

She was not punished for the fright she had caused. When Mr. Mace found that it was only a half-starved cat he had to brave, he made a bigger hole in the planking, dropped into the shaft, and brought up pussy without flinching, although she made a famished snap at his fingers. While she was ravenously lapping the saucerful of milk poured out for her in the parlour, the grocer began to chaff the Professor about his "lovly voman." But Mrs. Mace's sense of justice, stimulated by her fear of offending a regularly paying and "most highly respectable, though he *is* a furriner," lodger, would not allow her to let her husband enjoy this cheap triumph unmolested.

"After all, Mace," she said, "if it hadn't been for Mr. Goutier, the poor thing might have been left to die down there; and she's done us a good turn anyhow in skearing away the rats. I haven't seen one, nor heared nayther, for this ever so long. If you're so mighty brave, sir, p'r'aps you'll please to go down and draw your beer for yourself, for Molly hain't got over her fright; and I should like a drop myself, arter all this flurry, so you can fill the jug."

Mr. Mace took it, remarking, to cover his henpecked retreat, with a semi-complimentary sarcasm, "Arter all, Mr. Goutier, you're not so far wrong. Some lovely women is uncommon like cats; but mine, you see, will take good care that she ain't starved."

The boys slept so soundly when at last they did get to sleep that they had to be called in the morning. The hospitable Professor gave them a breakfast which quite made up for their broken rest, and kindly went with them to school to make sure that he had not got them into trouble by keeping them at his lodgings.

But there their self-conceit received a shock. Since the night before, so much excitement had prevailed at Miss Lamblion's from another cause that Dick and Percy had scarcely been missed. Miss Quinciner had vanished.

The afternoon before she had taken out the boys for their usual holiday walk, she had taken tea with them as usual, but at prayer-time (it had been Miss Carter's turn to sit with the boys while preparing their next day's lessons in the evening) Miss Quinciner

could not be found, and since then nothing had been seen or heard of her.

She was not much missed by the boys, except in the pleasant way of missing her scoldings. Miss Carter (whose attainments, it has been hinted, were not equal to her amiability) had to take her senior's classes, and therefore may have wished her back, but she was the only person in the house who did so. Miss Quinciner's boys were only too delighted to be transferred to Miss Carter's gentle rule, whilst Miss Carter's boys found, if possible, an even more indulgent mistress in Mrs. Dow.

All day long the mystery continued unsolved, but next day, when the French lesson was due, the morning post brought Miss Lamblion a brief letter from "Mossoo," requesting the settlement of his account up to date, resigning the honour of teaching for the future in her school, recommending a gentleman to whom he had sold the goodwill of his connection, and enclosing a longer epistle, of which the following is a copy:—

"MADAM,—You may, perhaps, feel surprised that I should have quitted your establishment without giving you notice of my intention to do so; but in thus acting I not only consulted my own feelings of delicacy, but wished to spare both of us the pain which might possibly have resulted from a verbal explanation. I have long been dissatisfied with the position I have occupied. Neither in deference nor in pecuniary remuneration have I been treated in the manner to which my attainments and character entitled me. It is needless for me to state that I am not alone in this opinion, and equally unnecessary, I imagine, to inform you that, *with most able assistance*, I am about to open an educational institute of a superior kind to that in which I have wasted what should have been the brightest days oı my fortunately unexhausted youth. I wish to make no personal reflections, but on entering upon a new enterprise it is reassuring to feel that one's powers have yet to ripen to maturity, instead of having long since fallen into the sere and yellow leaf. The duties of my institution will commence on my return from a little trip that I am about to take. I will forgive you the modicum due to me of my salary for this quarter, most meagre in its entirety. I do not feel sure that I ought to do you even this small favour, but I am aware that I have put you to considerable inconvenience in forcing you (after all, through your

own fault) to cast about suddenly for a successor (not easily found, as you will discover) who can fitly fill the vacancy which your loss of me has made in your otherwise most incompletely appointed establishment.

"My boxes, although not corded, are packed. I shall feel obliged if you will have the goodness to deliver them to the carrier, who will call with the authorisation of my new address:

WOODBINE VILLA

(*Refined Seminary for the Sons of Gentlemen, on the Most Improved Principles*),

LONDON ROAD, BRACKENBURY.

"This morning I was united to the best of men.

"I am, Madam,

"Yours truly,

"RACHEL D'ENFLURE (*née* QUINCINER).

"P.S.—Of course I cannot expect *you* to congratulate me. My husband has informed me of the very ridiculous, but on your part (as you had not, like Alphonse, the excuse of youth) highly unbecoming, nonsense which passed between you. He asserts solemnly, although, of course, I stood in no need of such assurance, that any complimentary speeches he may have addressed to you were prompted solely by his playful desire to practise on your credulous vanity. He is charitable enough to add that he is well aware that in this respect you are no worse than other women of your age. "R. D'E.

"P.P.S.—To show that I bear you no ill-will, notwithstanding the unjust treatment I have received from you, should a pupil be offered to me of a class beneath that for which my seminary is intended, I will, so far as I conscientiously can, recommend your establishment to his parents. "R. D'E."

The only reply which Miss Lamblion vouchsafed to "Mossoo's" letter was to send him his money in her letter to his wife, which ran as follows:—

"DEAR RACHEL,—I am very sorry that you should have been so silly. You really are old enough to know better. If, after giving your friends to understand that you had quite made up your mind

to continue in the enjoyment of single blessedness which had been so long your happy lot, you must needs marry, why on earth could not you give proper notice, and get married in a decent, comfortable manner? As you have been so long in my service, I would have given the breakfast, and you could have been married from my house, which would have been of advantage to you in the eyes of the world; though even if your wedding had been as respectable as I fear it has been the reverse, I should have regretted to see you placing yourself in the power of such a man. I do hope that you *are* married, and that he has not deceived you with an eye to getting into his hands the little money you have saved out of your 'meagre salary.' It is the first time I was ever accused of niggardliness in money, or, indeed, in any other matters. I was not aware that you were discontented, and, indeed, you had no reason to be, as you may soon discover to your cost. However, as I have said before, you really are old enough to be able to take care of yourself, or ought to be by this time. I can fill up your place without difficulty, so you need not concern yourself about that; but I cannot help feeling hurt that one who has been so long in my service should have shown so little confidence in me, and have left my house in such an ungracious, disreputable manner. I enclose the money asked for. I believe that I have legal power not only to withhold it, but also to punish you both for not fulfilling your contracts with me. I should, however, be very sorry to part in such a way from one whom I had come to look upon as an old friend, and I fear, besides, that you may soon want every penny you can lay your hands on. Your boxes shall be sent as desired, and you must do me the favour to accept the little wedding present which I shall send with them. I sincerely hope that your school will answer. As it will be, as you say, of quite a different class from mine, there may be room for it in Brackenbury, but as I find a difficulty in making both ends meet with my terms, I fear you will find it *very* hard work on your necessarily lower ones. You are quite at liberty to name me as one of your references, and I shall have great pleasure in testifying to the diligent discharge of your duties during the time I employed you.

"Believe me,

"Your sincere well-wisher,

"MARY LAMBLION.

"P.S.—I cannot say what your husband may have told you, but I will let you know the *truth*. He had the impertinence to propose marriage to me, with the air of one offering a favour which could not possibly be refused. Instead of answering him as you seem to have done, I boxed his ears,—as I shall be compelled to do again, should he presume henceforth to address me on any pretext whatsoever. "M. L."

In fact, "Mossoo" was a lazy scamp, weary of the trouble of giving even his perfunctory lessons, and determined to get a wife to work for him. His success with Miss Lamblion has been recorded. After a time even his conceit learned that he had no chance with pretty Miss Carter; and then, finding that Miss Quinciner had put by some money, he made fierce love to her upon the sly. The foolish old maid was easily prevailed upon to trust her savings to him. With part he furnished Woodbine Villa, which he called *his* house; the rest he appropriated for pocket-money, as he did the sum he obtained by the sale of his "goodwill." If he had not wanted a wife to work for him, very likely he would not have married Miss Quinciner after all, when he had got her money; but as he did want such a wife, he did marry her in the church of a quiet village near Brackenbury in which he had lodged (and it was said not paid for his lodgings) for a short time before the wedding. After the return of the "young couple" from their brief wedding tour, the "Refined Seminary for the Sons of Gentlemen on the Most Improved Principles" was opened in the London Road, with, in spite of its superior social status, lower terms, as Miss Lamblion had anticipated, than her own. Nevertheless, it did not fill. Miss Lamblion had good reason not to fear its rivalry, Mme. d'Enflure made attempts to get away some of Miss Lamblion's pupils by direct application to their parents, and the offended parents publicly reported the private application, which certainly did not raise Mme. d'Enflure's character in the estimation of Brackenbury and its vicinity. Other parents, whom her terms would have suited, although they could not afford to send their sons to Miss Lamblion, had a great respect for her, and therefore would not send them to Mme. d'Enflure when they found how she had treated her generous ex-mistress.

At his best "Mossoo" had never been a favourite in the town; and when the circumstances of his marriage became known, he was sent to Coventry as a black sheep. The Professor did not scruple to call him *lâche*, *coquin*, *cochon*, and several other strong epithets, washed his hands of him as even a nodding acquaintance, and deeply regretted that he could not deny their common countrymanship.

"Mossoo's" unpopularity reflected on the unfortunate gentleman whom he had lured across the Channel and beguiled into giving a very handsome sum for his very precarious goodwill. Miss Lamblion at first was by no means disposed to take a new French master on the recommendation of M. d'Enflure; and other people followed her lead. If she had not discovered that poor M. Appliqué had been most shamefully duped, and so in the first instance engaged him out of pity, other people again following her lead, he might have starved in England, or found his way back to France the best way he could without anything to compensate him for his fleecing.

He turned out to be a far more efficient, although far less bumptious, teacher than his introducer. Even the jealous drawing-master liked him at first, if for no other reason, because he had taken the place of his predecessor; but when Mr. Reynolds found that Miss Carter (probably for no other reason) also liked the substitute, he began to hate harmless M. Appliqué more furiously than he had hated intrusive M. d'Enflure, whose presence, even a jealous lover could not help seeing, Miss Carter loathed.

A substitute was easily found for Miss Quinciner in the person of Miss Drummond, who was not only much younger, handsomer, kinder, and "jollier" than the late occupant of her desk, but also much more learned and accomplished.

Thus things again went on much as usual at Miss Lamblion's, only more pleasantly than before.

When, in their walks, Miss Lamblion's long Noah's Ark train chanced to meet Mme. d'Enflure's half-dozen very little, and by no means strikingly aristocratic-like, "sons of gentlemen," the latter lady looked superciliously at the new teacher, utterly ignored Miss Carter, and very audibly addressed the very small cock of her "Refined Seminary, conducted on the Most Improved Principles," as "my lord." His lordship wore a skeleton suit, too

short in the legs and arms, which did not add to the dignity o his personal appearance.

"My dear lord," Mme. d'Enflure on one occasion exclaimed to this professed sprig of nobility, "what would the Marquis, your noble father, or the foreign Duke, your distinguished uncle, say, if they saw your lordship deigning to notice the ribald antics of the rabble populace?"

His lordship had been grinning in the most condescending manner at a comical grimace which Percy Sharpe had been rude enough to make at him.

Poor Mme. d'Enflure! Before the end of the half her husband, finding that the school did not answer according to his anticipations, decamped, taking with him the remnant of his pocket money, and more cash, which he had raised by a bill of sale on the furniture, leaving his wife to meet it, to pay the rent, and settle all their tradesmen's accounts.

She would have been sold up had not Miss Lamblion kindly consented to become security for her.

XVIII.

BUT before Mme. d'Enflure had been subdued by circumstances and kindness into sulky neutrality rather than gratitude, she had several more opportunities of giving herself airs; and she did not lose one of them.

In that comic Latin book which Dick quoted and copied for the mystification of the old gardener there is a picture of a little boy capering about given as an illustration of the example, *Efferor studio videndi pulices industriosos* ("I am transported with delight at the thought of seeing the Industrious Fleas").

They have become a very stale exhibition by this time, but they were quite fresh in Dick's young days; and he and his schoolmates were as delighted as the aforesaid capering little boy when they heard that the diligent insects were to be exhibited at the Brackenbury Assembly Rooms, and that they were to be taken to the exhibition. All the other schools in Brackenbury patronised the show; and as it was open only on one half-holiday, and half-holidays were the only time that schools could spare for sight-seeing in those days, it chanced that they were all there at about

the same time—Miss Lamblion's boys under command of Miss Drummond and Miss Carter. Mrs. Dow had been asked to accompany them, but had declined with thanks and a shudder. Gentle though she was, housewifely instincts had prompted the good lady to add with a ferocity which was very funny in her, "If I did go, I'm sure I should kill the nasty things. It would go against my conscience to see a flea without killing it. I'm sure that's all they were created for—to be killed." Miss Drummond having suggested that in that case it might, perhaps, have saved trouble if they had not been created, Mrs. Dow answered, "No, my dear, if you'll excuse me speaking so to a young lady so much better informed than myself. Hunting for them teaches cleanliness and industry, as you'll know when you've to manage a house of your own. But that's no reason why they should be made a show of, and called industrious themselves."

Accordingly Mrs. Dow did not go to the show.

It being "first come, first served," there, Miss Lamblion's boys for some time monopolised in successive circles the cartridge-paper disc across which six harnessed fleas, driven by a flea coachman, drew a carriage containing a grandee flea, with two flea footmen hanging on behind—and the magnifying glasses which were necessary for the inspection of the other manœuvres of the comical little creatures. Mme. d'Enflure, who arrived next with her young noblemen, was very indignant at being kept waiting, and remarked aloud on the vulgar curiosity of some people. Thereupon Miss Carter, who was standing in front of her, turned and quietly inquired, "Ah, Miss Quin—— Mme. d'Enflure, what has brought you here?" At first Madame tried to look astonished at Miss Carter's presumption in addressing her—to stare as if she had never seen her before in her life. But this was rather too ridiculous for even the principal of Woodbine Villa to accomplish, and so she answered tartly, "I have brought my pupils to witness this exhibition in furtherance of their entomological studies. Sons of the nobility and gentry will have leisure in after-life for the pursuit of the refining study of natural history, but I cannot see what benefit you can expect your boys—how rudely they do crowd! —to derive from the sight. You, my dear, I am well aware, know nothing of science, and I suspect that my successor is equally ignorant."

The latter words were overheard by Dick, who had just struggled his way from the front, and with whom the senior teacher was a great favourite, although the junior still stood first in his loyal affection.

"Miss Drummond ignorant!" he cried. "Is she, though? She knows all the hard names for things, and then *she* tells us lots of nice stories about them, Miss Quinciner. Oh, Miss Carter, why don't you go and see?" he went on. "It's such fun! And then the man feeds the little beggars on the back of his hand!"

"Disgusting little barbarian!" muttered Mme. d'Enflure, and straightway removed her juvenile aristocracy from contact with company so contaminating.

At Wombwell's, too, she gave herself airs. Wombwell's visit to Brackenbury was one of the great events of its year—indeed, the menagerie did not come regularly every year, and therefore it was all the more highly thought of.

For some time before its arrival, hoardings, dead walls, and the sides of houses in good positions were covered with its great posters; its big bills were to be seen in the windows of every public-house and almost every other shop, and its lanky smaller bills were pasted broadcast upon posts.

People went outside the town to meet the procession, and the streets were lined with others who had left their business to see it pass.

First came gilt-lettered silk banners, and a fantastically painted and gilded car, drawn by eight piebalds, with jet black or cream-coloured harness, and mirror-like polished metal mountings, in which musicians in uniform banged, brayed, tootle-tootle-tooed, crashed, clashed. And then came a line of elephants, camels, and dromedaries in trappings, either led, ridden, or driven in tandem; and after these lumbered the huge yellow, red-wheeled caravans, drawn by great cart-horses that had to strain, big though they were, driven by very countrified-looking carters in Jim Crow hats, smock-frocks, and buskins, with long brass-ringed whips that bent when they were cracked better than the best fishing-rod old Peters ever made.

The waggons were arranged in an oblong in the middle of the widest street—a kind of laager camp, with board and canvas covering every gap as a protection against sightseers on the cheap;

the pictures of magnified lions, &c., and non-extant monsters, were hoisted in front, the musicians took their seats at the foot of these striking works of art ministering to science, and then, as soon as everything was ready, the band struck up and the public ascended, now with a rush, and now in a trickle, the steps leading from the street, paid its shillings and sixpences, and hurried down the steps leading to the bottom of the show. People who did not go inside used to assemble to see the outside, and listen to the music—especially at night, when (although some of the by-streets in Brackenbury were lighted with only dim oil-lamps that blinked like sleepy eyes), gas, turned on without regard to expense, flared lavishly in front of the orchestra in flapping, flickering tongues of flame. The Refined Seminary had the start of the old-established Preparatory School at Wombwell's. When Miss Lamblion's boys trooped down into the menagerie, Mme. d'Enflure had got half round it. Of course, she had not brought her young lords and gentlemen to the show for anything so vulgar as amusement, but simply for the furtherance of those elegant studies which they would have leisure to pursue in after-life in virtue of their nobility and gentility.

She had been reading up for the occasion, and tarried so long before each cage, supplementing the remarks of the showman, not much to the gratification, however much to the edification, of her little audience of very little fellows (the small boys at Miss Lamblion's used to call Mme. d'Enflure's the Infant School), that she was soon overtaken by the advanced guard of what she was pleased to call "the upstart rival establishment." She had just—having got confused among the monkeys—pointed out to his lordship the Barbary ape as the hanouman, and was proceeding to relate what she had just read about the way in which that sacred monkey is petted in the East, when the showman, who had looked over his shoulder, stopped, and said with a grin, "No, there you're wrong, mum. That's a Barbary ape, that is. We had one o' them you was talking about, but it died of a cold in the head two months back."

Mme. d'Enflure, indignant at being flatly contradicted at the head of her school, and in the presence of the public and members of the rival establishment, who had clustered around to discover what the dispute was about, angrily answered that she knew

better than the man, and that she should report him to his master for insolence. "You're welcome to, mum," he answered. "And, as for the monkey, have it as you like. You've paid your money, so you can take your ch'ice. *He* won't mind what you call him, so long as you don't call him too late for dinner. I only thought, as you was a-teaching the little uns, instead of letting them cut about and enj'y theirselves, you'd rayther they shouldn't be taught *lies*. That was all I meant, mum." Madame tried to look dignified, but failing, she walked off in a huff, intimating her intention of never again patronizing an exhibition in which persons of taste, knowledge, and refinement were exposed to the brutal insolence of ignorant underlings.

Poor little Lord Skeleton Suit and his brother-nobles looked very disappointed as they were marched out of the show before they had fed the elephants or seen the man go into the lion's cage.

Miss Lamblion's boys gave the elephants so bountiful a supply of buns, biscuits, sweetcakes, gingerbread, apples, and oranges that in recognition of their liberality the keeper ordered the biggest to lift Dick and Percy, as the youngest in the school, on to his tusks. When Dick had been lifted on to the left tusk as gently as if made of glass, "Hold on by the ear, sir," cried the keeper; "he won't mind it, and you'll be as safe as if you was in a armchair." When Chuney was quite sure that Dick was safely settled, he untwined his trunk, and raised Percy as tenderly to his other tusk, and when he had restored them to their companions, he made the whole school, in obedience to orders, a profound salaam; being afterwards rewarded with a bottle of Guinness's stout, the cork of which he drew himself.

The lion-tamer's performance, not only with lions, but also with other wild beasts, which he made jump through hoops, over his whip, and over one another, which he lashed when they were disobedient, and lay down upon and fondled when they were "good," whose paws he pulled up, whose jaws he pulled open, finishing off by thrusting his head thrice into the cavernous mouth of the biggest lion, must have stirred up Dick's mind to emulation. At any rate, he distinguished himself in far more dashing style than by simply allowing himself to be lifted on an elephant's tusk before he left the show.

The great Royal Bengal tiger was not one of the performing animals. Here is a verbatim report of the lecture which *his* showman delivered—of a different style from Mme. d'Enflure's, but perhaps, if less grammatical, more instructive ;

"The tiger, ladies and gentlemen, is a Hasiatic beast, and though not confined to hot temperaturs, is inwariably of a hot temper. He is a gamer beast than the lion. Anyhow, in a fight betwixt the pair on 'em, I'd lay my money on the tiger. His ferocity is prowerbial, especially when the she's a sucklin' of her young. The tiger can't climb, anyhow he don't, but he can leap higher and farther than any Injyrubber ball can bound, and come down upon his prey like a ton o' red-hot iron. He makes no more of a fat buffaler than you would of a shrimp, but when he has once tasted human flesh, he don't care for no other food. So stand back there, if you please, young gentlemen, or he'll be a-tastin' yours, and it would come hexpensive to keep a big beast like that, wi' a happetite as keen as his teeth, on little boys reg'ler. Notwithstandin', tiger-huntin' is a favourite diwersion of our hofficers in Ingy. It keeps their hands in, you see, for their proper business, for it's an even chance they may get killed instead o' killin'. He's a tougher customer, is the tiger, than a good many o' them they've got to tackle in battle. You've got spring-guns in England, and abroad the natives set spring-bows for the tiger,—the arrer he shoots hisself with, you see, bein' p'isoned. Another dodge they have is to make him crush hisself with a beam they've hung up ready for him. It's like the auctioneer's hammer when it comes down a-top of him—*that* lot's done for. And then there's queerer ways. A chap gets into a big wicker basket, where there's tigers likely to come, along wi' a kid,—not his own, you understand,—and wraps hisself up and goes to sleep, leavin' the little goat to keep watch. As soon as the scared kid hears the tigers a-snuffin', it wakes the man, and when one on 'em pounces on the basket, he stabs it between the withes, or bamboos, or whatever 'tis. Most like it's bamboos, for they call that, in their language, bamboozlin' the old un. And then they smear leaves with a sticky stuff like bird-lime, and strew 'em in the tiger's way. As soon as he feels the stuff, he tries to rub it off against his face, and so he goes on till he's bunged up his eyes, and then he lies down howlin' and rubbin' and rollin' till he's sticky all over, and the chaps a-layin' in wait for him come

out and shoot him as they please. There's others o' them Horiental dodgers set a trap for the tiger, as you might with bricks for sparrers, but what they baits with is a lookin' glass. The tiger fancies there's another glarin' at him, flies at the glass, and down comes the lid and nabs him.

"It has been said that the tiger is untameable, but, this, ladies and gentlemen, is a herror. Catch 'em young, and you can make 'em as tame as cats, though I can't say as I should like to have a full-grown un a-lying on my hearthrug when I was takin' my tea. These tame uns, though, are like cats in this, too—you never know how far you may go on wi' them. All of a suddent they'll cut up rough, when just afore they was as mild as milk; and it's a nasty way the tiger has of showin' of it, when he thinks there's liberties bein' took with him. And this I may say likewise of the magnificent speciment afore you—*he*'d never own a master. Even our dauntless Lion King dusn't wentur into his cage. My guv'nor will give a thousand pound down, and insure his life for the benefit of his widdy, to any gentleman as has a mind to try."

No one appeared disposed to accept this liberal challenge.

Whilst the showman had been delivering his lecture, the Royal Bengal, as if conscious that liberties were being taken with his character, or desirous to emphasise the description that was being given of him, had been impatiently pacing his den—backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards—savagely eyeing the crowd assembled to stare at him, baring his teeth, and ever and anon uttering a low growl. So great was the crowd that Miss Carter was not only pressed against the bar set up to keep people from getting too near the cages, but forced to bend a little way over it.

In an instant out came the tiger's paw, and clutched both sides of her shawl beneath the throat. The claws had not pierced the skin, but they had got a good grip of the shawl. The shawl was stout, and in another minute poor Miss Carter would have been drawn up to the cage had not little Dick dived under the bar, snatched an umbrella out of an old woman's hand, and brought the hooked brass handle down on the tiger's foot with all his force, whereupon the tiger let go the shawl, and grabbed at Dick, catching him by the tunic tail. The women shrieked, the men turned

sick and pale, but the showman dashed in to the rescue. Striking at the tiger with a tough, thick ash bar like a handspike (kept in

"In another minute poor Miss Carter would have been drawn up to the cage."

readiness for such emergencies), he caught up Dick under the other arm, and, the cloth giving way with a wide-running tear,

leaped over the bar like a deer and put our little friend down unharmed. The people in the show gave a great cheer, and you may be sure that Miss Lamblion's boys did not make the least part of the noise.

"Well, you're a good-plucked un, youngster," said the admiring showman. "Never mind your coat. I'll go bail the lady 'll pay your tailor's bill."

The women made a rush from all sides to kiss Dick. He liked being kissed by Miss Carter, and didn't mind Miss Drummond and Mrs. Buskitt, who pushed her way through the throng, and hugged him as if she wanted to smother him instead of to show how fine a little chap she thought him; but Dick was very glad to escape from the embraces of the multitude.

If he had been a favourite with his mates and mistresses before, you can fancy what he was afterwards.

On reaching school, Dick had more kissing to endure—from Miss Lamblion, Mrs. Dow, and all the maid-servants; but that, he was ungracious enough to observe, wasn't so bad as being slobbered over by a lot of wet-faced women he had never seen before in his life.

Miss Lamblion had to listen to a dozen or more narrators of Dick's prowess, all talking at once. When she had at last got a definite notion of what had happened, she put on her bonnet and shawl and hurried down to the menagerie, where she rewarded Dick's deliverer so handsomely that the showman kept on touching his hat like a machine as he answered, "Thankee, mum; I thankee wery kindly. You're wery lib'ral. I hope no more o' your young gentlemen will come to grief, but if they do, I shouldn't mind having the reskyin' of the whole lot on 'em, one down, another come on, at your price, mum."

XIX.

A HALF-HOLIDAY country walk on a fine day in October is a very pleasant break in school-business; and if on Saturday afternoon, it seems all the more of a holiday. There may, or there may not, be some lessons to learn, or to seem to learn, in the evening; but, at any rate, there will be no lessons to say until the Monday. Regular lessons, that is, and as the little Sunday tasks at Miss

Lamblion's were very light burdens, her boys were in very good spirits when, after an early dinner, they filed, upon a beautiful, calm, bright October day, out of the great blue gates for a walk to the quiet little country village in which Mossoo and Miss Quinciner had got married on the sly.

Miss Drummond, although she really preserved discipline much better than her predecessor, was not nearly so much of a martinet. As soon as the boys were fairly out of the town she let them leave their ranks; and scattering like uncoupled dogs, they instantly began to explore hedge and ditch to the right and left and the meadows and fields beyond. It was a very pleasant road they had to travel. The roadside trees dropped red and yellow leaves slowly, softly on their heads and at their feet, and honeysuckle hung its fragrant autumn blossoms about the berry-loaded bushes of the hedges. Now and then a green-streaked white or yellow cottage was passed, or a red and blue brick one, beamed with grey timber, embroidered with green and orange and silver lichens, roofed with mossy thatch, and standing in little squares of garden ground, or long, lanky, tapering strips taken in from the grassy roadside—gardens every inch of which, except the space occupied by tall hollyhock and lily-stems, rose-bushes and a few other flowers, was given up to little apple-trees, gooseberry and currant bushes, cabbages, onions run to seed in fluffy-headed drumsticks, parsnips, potatoes, and nasturtiums cultivated partly for their prettiness and partly for pickle. In some stood a greyish bench, with a bee-skep, or perhaps two, upon it, both looking as time-mellowed as the cottages, or one making the other appear of immemorial antiquity through its contrast to the golden brightness of its companion's coils of speckless new straw. White-headed tots toddled to the gates to watch the merry boys go by, staring with round skim-milk eyes expanded to their utmost, but ready at a moment's alarm to cease sucking their podgy thumbs and toddle back to the protection of the maternal apron-strings; whilst their mothers, busy over their Saturday's cleaning up, but glad of even a minute's rest and novelty, straightened their backs, and, still kneeling, watched the procession with one hand on the clinking pail-handle and the other holding the dripping scrubbing-brush. Farmsteads also were passed, old homes snugly ringed-in with yellow and rich brown rick and stack, thatched grey and

black barns, stables, cow-houses, cattle sheds, cart-lodges, and other out-buildings; great spreading walnut-trees, old-fashioned garden-jumbles, and green orchards—with here and there a superannuated white pony stumbling over the grass, or poultry pecking about in it—full of lime-washed trees, bending, in spite of their grey crutches, beneath their green, golden, russet, rosy, puce, and purple loads of fruit—the pleasant islands, in the sea of far-spreading country hush, enlivened by a medley of cluck, crow, cackle, low whinny, somnolent grunt, and heavy or high-pitched human voices.

More than one long reach of green-powdered grey park paling, with small-leaved ivy in flower spreading over it and finding a way between its chinks, did the boys troop past. Within they could hear the bucks grunting, and see, from rising ground, single deer and little herds of does and fawns standing at gaze, or couched in the green, black, brown, and rust-red bracken. Rooks, with mellowed hoarseness, croaked and cawed about their nest-trees in the parks, or high overhead, outward or homeward bound; and startled cock-pheasants flew up from grassy, briary ditches with the sudden noise and flash of fireworks, their necks gleaming in jewelled brilliance as they crossed the sunshine filtered through the faded yet gorgeous foliage of the trees overhanging the fences and hedges. Rabbits scurried in zigzags across the chequered road, and hares came lazily limping along with flapping ears, or raised them in stiff notes of exclamation and interrogation when startled into an abrupt halt upon their haunches.

The flail had not gone out of use in those days. The boys could hear it leisurely thud-thud-thudding in blunt rhythm within lonely old grey and reddish-black field-barns, that seemed to have left the society of other buildings with rogue-elephants' sulky love of solitude—as the school, compelled by circumstances to fall into two-and-two formation again, or to march in single file, threaded the paths of undulating brown, white-speckled black, and chocolate-coloured soil, which heavy-footed, round-shouldered men were sowing broadcast, clapping their arms across the crinkled breasts of their smockfrocks as if the weather had been wintry instead of mild as May—when May was May. From other fields still covered with crops, black or broad-leaved green, or bristling with stubble, there arose great flocks of wood-pigeons

with startling clap of wings. Gossamer floated about like spun-glass; winged ants made a gauzy shimmer in the sunshine. Some of the pastures were fairy-ringed; in another Percy found a snake's skin turned inside out from head to tail. There were not many flowers to pick, but there were still butterflies left to chase—at least youngsters suppose that to be the final cause of butterflies' existence. In passing through a leaf-littered wood, in which red squirrels were scampering up and down the trees like men-of-war's-men that had changed jackets with marines, a painted lady had been flushed as she fanned upon a cluster of golden-rod her rose, pearl, snow, and orange. In this wood, moreover, Miss Drummond had told the boys, to their great delight, the stories she had read and heard about the ash-tree; how it used to be split open when young for infirm children to be passed through the opening, and how the children were supposed to be cured if the tree's wound healed when plastered with clay, and how shrew-mice, whose bite, it was believed, could only be cured by cutting the poor creatures in two and laying the sundered portions on the bitten part, and which were also credited, or discredited, with the power of crippling beasts by merely crawling over them, were buried alive in ash-trees, which were thenceforth called shrew-ashes, and imagined to have virtue to restore to vigour the shrew-bewitched cat, dog, hog, sheep, goat, calf, cow, bullock, ass, or horse, if a twig from them were used to stroke the sufferers. And then, *à propos* of a wild bee booming by, Miss Drummond had further told them about tame bees being deferentially informed of deaths and marriages in their owner's families, and their hives put into mourning or adorned with wedding favours accordingly; about spilling salt and sowing hempseed, strangers flapping on the bars of the grate, coffins bouncing from the fire, winding-sheets forming on the candle, &c., &c.—superstitions which, just because they could hardly be said to fall under the head of useful information, the boys liked to hear about better than anything they learnt in their Mangnall or Pinnock's Catechisms.

In the road more than one red admiral had been sighted and pursued, and when the boys got down to the willows by the water-side they captured a velvety Camberwell beauty. But to reach the river they had to go over some down-like hills, dotted with briars hung with locks of wool, furze, heather, chalk-pits, and

shallow little ponds, littered with flints, and clumped with sociable beech-trees in rings, relics of the great forest, in which robbers used to lurk,—where sheep were feeding or straggling baaing, and making a musical tinkling with their bells.

Then an old high-pitched bridge was crossed, and Miss Drummond led her infantry into the little village. The little street in which it began led to a common, ringed round with elms, from one of which hung the sign of the village inn, and its water-trough was an elm tree hollowed. Amongst the other trees were scattered the church, the parsonage, the forge, the wheelwright's, the tiny butcher's shop, whose front was almost filled by a single sheep, *the* shop which sold everything except butcher's meat that villagers require, one or two comparatively modern houses inhabited by persons who had retired from business in the village or elsewhere on very modest "competences," and a number of old-fashioned white cottages, with flap shutters hanging down like leaves of tables, and bushy little front-gardens.

On the common stood an almost roofless cage; and beside the road which skirted the common, rotten stocks, and an almost equally decayed finger-post with the pointer broken, or rather mouldered, off. Dusty, clogged donkeys, weedy, long-tailed ponies, mud-patched pigs, and stiff-necked geese, stumbling and stalking about the furze and broom, cropped the grass almost as short as a convict's hair; and the plump ducks, paddling and quacking in the milkily-turbid pond in the middle, seemed to enjoy the thickness of the water, which they scooped up with their yellow bills. The chalk and water served as dressing to their salad of duck-weed. By another little street or lane of old cottages (some of which had rusty horseshoes on their gables and brighter ones upon their well-worn thresholds), the village straggled out to a little freehold farm farmed by the freeholder, with scarcely any other help than that of his wife; and then to another reach of ivied paling, behind which undulated another richly-wooded deer-park, in which stood an old monastery, patched up and enlarged into a mansion known as the Abbey, or Great House, with hills in the background scarped here and there into chalk cliffs, and dotted with more clumps of wide-branched and yet clustering beeches. The Abbey was shut up during the greater part of the year, and, notwithstanding its being within an easy

walk of an important town, this village I am telling you about was as drowsy, behind-the-time a little place as you could have found in all England. If it had not been for the Brackenbury people, who came there to fish, or landed when boating to have a glass of the Three Compasses' humming old ale after their pull, the Beversham people would have known scarcely anything of what was going on in the outside world. There were no penny papers in those days; and though the *County Mercury* was taken in at the Three Compasses, there were very few of the inn's customers who could read it, and those not without spelling and pauses for which the printers had supplied no points.

Miss Drummond took her boys to the little farm, and there regaled them on new milk, and home-made bread, and warm currant-cakes which the good woman of the house had just baked. She was glad enough to sell her milk and her bread and her cakes; for though it may seem a delightful thing to farm a little bit of land of one's own, yet people who do so farm—when the land is a very little bit—although they can generally manage by working hard to get enough to eat and drink, are often very hard-up for money. If she let the milk stand for cream, the good woman thought, instead of getting a good ready-money price for it, very likely the cream might sour or the butter turn out bad; and as for the pigs, it would be easy enough to give them something else, for once in a way, to make up for the skim. She'd have to bake again, she informed Miss Drummond, but she'd kept enough bread to last her and the old man and the lad till then; and as for the cakes, they must wait until she could find time to make 'em another batch. But though the small farmer's wife was shrewd enough in raising the market for her wares, she was as firm a believer in witchcraft as any of the dwellers in the cottages with the horseshoes on them. Dame Durpham had one on her own threshold. I will tell you a witch story which she told the boys and their governess as they sat—seated how and where they could—resting and refreshing themselves. Of course Miss Drummond told her pupils afterwards that it was all nonsense; but since she had a liking for stories of that kind, she did not interrupt the worthy dame in the telling of it.

"Well, no, mum," said Mrs. Durpham, "I won't go for to say that there's witches in the parish at this present time—though

who's to tell? But there was in my mother's, and more in her mother's afore her. Old Nick's had a lot o' dealuns in this parish. They do say—but that was in my granny's time—he dressed hisself up like the parson, and went up into the pulpit, too, and preached an uncommon good sermon, 'cept that everybody as had heard it wanted to be wicked as soon as it was over. It stands to reason that there must ha' been witches here, for there's the Witch Pond still in Farmer Lovejoy's forty-acre where they used to duck em. And there's his gate, too, leadin' in to the rickyard, where the last waggon at harvest time stuck fast, and none could move it, tho' there was plenty o' room atween the wheels and the postes, in his great-grandfa'r's time, becos' the old man wouldn't let old Witch Jeakes begin to lease afore all the waggons was out o' the field. I mind well myself when I was a little un, there was talk of a gell that used to spit pins, and bring 'em out all over her flesh too, becos she was bewitched, and if she was took into church, she'd scream and holler so as the parson couldn't hear his own voice, and go dancin' about like a wild thing—she didn't kear where she went—till she was outside again. My own mother have seen and heard her, thof I can only remember of her—I was so young then. The worst witch that ever was in Beversham, I've heard, was Old Goody Bray. Folk tell of her still. She lived in the last house on the Brackenbury Road—that's pretty nigh as old as the church. She could blight a field o' carn by looking at it, just as if her eyes was barberries. All kind o' shapes she put on when she went to meet the devil, but mostly 'twas a black cat. She'd got one, and the two on 'em used to goo out together, and when folk seed 'em, they'd say, 'There's mischief brewin'—there goes Goody Bray and her cat. She'd sold herself to the devil when she was quite a young ooman—written her name in his book with her own blood in the Hanger yonder, thof how she could write afore she turned witch is more than I know. There ain't many old women in Beversham nowadays as signs wi' anything but a cross, and that oodn't do for the devil's book. Most like he helped her. The reason why she sold herself, they say, was becos' she couldn't get the young man she wanted. He'd got a fancy for another gell, and so they married. The rain came down fit to drownd ye when they was married, and that's unlucky for a bride, and then there come a storm o' thunder and lightning that struck the bells and melted 'em when they began

to peal. Arter that the witch let the young couple alone a bit, to deceive 'em like, but as soon as children came she began again, and tormented 'em one arter another,' till she'd finished 'em all off. She'd come and sit on 'em like a cat when they were in bed, and suck their breath, and some was allus fallin' into fits, and their food wouldn't agree with 'em, so that folk thought at first 'twas their mother as p'isoned them; and one was choked drinking plain water, and not one on 'em could the mother suckle. A lot o' children the poor folk had, and they was all afflicted somehow, blind, or deaf, or dumb, or crooked, and a-twitch all over. And them as lived to grow up all came to bad ends—not one on 'em died in their beds. And arter that the witch went at their mother. She made a image of her and bored it with a red-hot poker, and stuck knives into it, and poured scalding grease over it, and the poor woman she'd a spite against felt the pain of it all, and when she was churning the butter 'd never come, and everything she put her hand to turned out bad, so that her husband came to hate her, and said it was an unlucky day for him whenever he'd married an ooman as was good for nothin' except to eat and drink and spend his money on clothes; and he did not love her any the better when she fell into a decline, becos', you see, she lay so long a-dyin'. At last she melted away like. The man as made her coffin was one of her bearers, and he said as the coffin didn't seem a bit heavier when the corpse was in than when it was out. Arter she was gone, they found a dead ear under her bed. Nobbudy could say how it come there, but of course it was the witch. She was orfen grubbin about in the churchyard arter dark, when other folk didn't like to goo near it, sometimes like a powny and sometimes as a cat; and one night, when a man was comin' through for a short cut, a great monkey jumped off a grave and run up a tree, and there was another up there a'ready, and there they sat jabberin' at him with their teeth and eyes a-fire. It's easy to guess who the two on 'em were. 'Twas no wonder the poor ooman died as she did, for the witch had melted away the image she'd made of her, a little bit every day.

"If her husband thought that he was going to have a bit o' peace now he'd got rid of her, he found hisself mistaken. Goody Bray hadn't done with him yet. She blighted his carn as I was a-sayin' just by lookin' at it, and he couldn't keep an apple on a tree. Down they come all squashy or maggoty, or not bigger than

a marble, and full o' rotten dust. The rats and the foxes eat up his poultry, and he couldn't kill a pig but the pork was measly, and his cows and bullocks died o' the murrain, and as sure as he'd a horse as he set store by she'd manage to make it stake itself. She'd turn herself into a black bell-wether, too, and lead his sheep astray, till they all got bogged. At last when she'd druv the poor man desp'rate, she tempted him to sell his soul to the devil, promisin' as Old Harry ood make him as rich as he'd made him poor, and richer. He was to meet her at twelve at night by the black pond in the Hanger, and there the old un ood meet them. Well, he went, but when the devil pulled out his black book, the man's heart failed him, and he oodn't sign, although he had cut the back of his hand all ready. Then the witch pushed him into the pond in a rage, and he was drownded. But just then the moon shone out, and the devil disappeared, and before Goody Bray could change herself into a cat again, a tramp that was sleeping in the wood woke up and saw who it was, and told on her. And so she was brought up afore the magistrates, and they tried her with the 'I believe' and 'Our Father,' and she couldn't say 'em, but only spluttered; and searched her for her marks, and pricked 'em, but she never shed a tear; then they ducked her, but she wouldn't drownd. So it was plain she was a witch, and they hanged her on the common, where the finger-post stands now. They say she walks in her old house. I know I shouldn't like to live in it, for all it's got pretty nigh a team o' horse-shoes on it."

When the school passed the haunted house on their return, Dick glanced at it so nervously that Percy, who was rather fond of teasing his chum when he could get the chance, exclaimed triumphantly, "Why, Bantam, what a queer chap you are! You'll tackle a tiger, and yet you're afraid of an old woman's ghost."

XX.

PERCY's mamma had been very glad when he received an invitation to spend his Michaelmas holidays at Foxearth, on her own account as well as his, for Mrs. Sharpe was something like the old woman who lived in a shoe, and had so many children she didn't know what to do. She had no wish to give them some broth without any bread, and to whip them all round and send them to bed, but

she was not sorry to get rid of them at times. They all lived at home: a young man in his father's office, just out of his articles, a series of big girls, a hobbledehoy just into his articles in his father's office, a big boy who was a foundation scholar at the Grammar School, and then a series of younger girls, the family finishing off with Master Percy. Mrs. Sharpe thought that she had quite enough children of her own, and would not have been greatly distressed if Fortune had given some of them to Uncle and Aunt John, who had housed Percy and his young friend so hospitably after their adventure with the gipsies. The Misses Sharpe thought there were quite enough boys at home—too many, indeed. Still, as Percy had been so kindly treated at Foxearth, it became necessary to invite Dick to spend one afternoon during the half with him at the Cedars, as Mr. Sharpe's old-fashioned house was called, from the two trees in its forecourt, looking like great black blots on the yellow-wash of its pargeted plaster front. A broad brass plate on the front door bore the inscription:—

MR. V. SHARPE,

Attorney and Solicitor;

and the same legend in white letters on a black tin plate appeared on one of the door-posts of the arched gateway of the yard leading to the out-buildings and the garden; a hand painted on the house-wall, with a good many flourishes for a wrist-band, pointing to the "Office," as both the words painted on the wall and a little brass plate declared some rooms reached by a partly opened side door to be.

When Dick went to the Cedars he had plenty to eat and drink, and the younger Sharpe girls, perhaps, were rather glad of his visit, because it brought them cake, biscuits, and marmalade for tea, instead of plain bread-and-butter, and fruit, and nuts, and raspberry wine afterwards; but they had very little to say to their little brother's guest. The elder Misses Sharpe had very little more, and the hobbledehoy and big boy nothing. Mr. and Mrs. Sharpe, and Mr. J. Sharpe, jun., named after his uncle, and like him in his temper, were the only persons in the family who seemed to put themselves at all out of the way to remember Dick's existence, and after all their notice did not come to much. Percy, remembering the hearty way in which he had been treated by every one at Fox-

earth, felt ashamed, and was afraid that Dick would feel uncomfortable and offended; but Dick, on the other hand, enjoyed being left alone, inasmuch as this included leave to wander where he liked about the premises. Of the premises likewise Percy had felt ashamed, fearing that Dick would think them very tame after the resources of the delightful places in which he could ramble about in the country, but Percy became quite proud of his home when he saw the fun that Dick found in exploring it.

By a crooked staircase opening on the roof by a door, like that of a ship's companion, they went out upon the leads, and made themselves deliciously limy and grimy in clambering over the rows of rough roof ridges; they cut their names upon the lead of the gutters, and risked their necks in pulling old sparrows' and starlings' nests out of holes under the eaves; they had first-rate practice at the birds upon the cedars and the garden trees, and the cats prowling like themselves upon the housetops; they climbed up the chimney-stacks, and dropped little bits of tile down the chimney-pot which Percy thought must belong to the kitchen fireplace.

Moreover, the house joining upon one side on to others, the young monkeys extended their rambles to the roofs of these, and startled people coming quietly upstairs by tapping on skylights, and peering down on them with hideously grotesque grimaces.

When tired of the roofs, the boys went down to a long room on the top floor of the Cedars, a medley of nursery, or play-room, and lumber-room.

Where limp-legged old boots, mottled with blue mould, old boxes, old bedsteads, superannuated foot-baths, rotten rope, battered coal-scuttles, old bonnets, old gowns, rusty fire-irons, piles of yellow newspapers, mutilated dolls, smashed Noah's arks, and other superseded toys, crumpled up birdcages, old hats and caps, fusty carpet-bags bulged out with some kind of rubbish carefully locked in, flabby empty carpet-bags whose iron tops gape like hungry jaws, mangy hassocks, topless music-stools, broken-bottomed cane-chairs, handless clock-faces, cordless sash-weights, stray sofa-legs without castors, and broken bannisters (available for the broad sword exercise), old pictures without frames, and old frames without pictures, queer little caved-in fenders, that seemed to have been meant for big dolls' houses, bent stair-rods, dismounted bells without clappers, and other valuable articles of

that kind, are collected, with a sufficient accompaniment of dust, damp cobwebs, and a strong suspicion, almost amounting to certainty, of rats and mice, boys can always find one of their mysterious delights; and then there was in the Cedars lumber-room a special attraction: a tottering, worm-eaten billiard-table, whose ragged top had been turned into a (once) green plain, on which grazed (Noah's ark) invalided sheep, oxen, horses, giraffes, elephants, hogs, ladybirds about the same size, etc.; dotted with (toy) trees and houses, cut up into paddocks by (toy) hurdles, and watered by (bits of looking-glass) lakes, on which floated (tin) boats, swans, and collapsed (magnetic) fishes. This magnificent work of art was the joint production of the younger Misses Sharpe, but I grieve to say that their Goth of a brother and his equally tasteless and ungallant companion, having their taws with them—a blood-alley and a stoney—turned it into a field for the exercise of their artillery, and made fearful havoc of its rural beauties; afterwards propping up the damaged houses, felled trees, etc., in a contemptibly perfunctory manner; but when their would-be "repairs" were finished, a lake, smashed by a shot plumped upon it, remained to tell of their clandestine inroad.

At the Cedars, the rails of the bannisters were so broad that when by that route he had reached the hall, Dick persuaded Percy to accompany him to the top of the house again, in order that they might enjoy once more the ecstasy of the *facilis descensus.*

After that they went out into the yard, passing through the kitchen, where cook was grumbling because "the soot had a-bin a-fallin' so, and bricks an' mortar, too—she expected the old chimley would come down one o' these days, if master didn't have it seed to."

As they passed the office window, Dick, who had long been curious to know what attorneys did, peeped in, and all that he saw being two young copying clerks scratching away, he informed his friend that he wouldn't care to be a lawyer, and have to keep on write, write, write, just as if he hadn't left school. *He'd* rather be a doctor, and pound away at something.

Mr. Sharpe's stable and coach-house were even emptier than Miss Lamblion's, which you know were used as menageries. They had, however, an equally delightful mouldy memory of the

uses to which they were once put brooding in their atmosphere; and, being freer from encumbrance, they made the better play-place.

I know that there *is* a pleasure—but it is so long ago since I enjoyed it that I cannot now even imagine "what like" (as the Scotch say) it is—in dropping from a hay loft, like the clown in a pantomime, into the rack below, scrambling out of the rack into the manger, and from the manger on to the round-pebbled stable-floor, and then scampering up the ladder for a *da capo* of the entertainment. When Dick and Percy had revelled in this luxury to their hearts' content, they went on into the garden. This was chiefly a kitchen-garden. Mr. Sharpe had a pretty good practice, but having also a very large family and a personal liking for a pretty good table, he found it convenient to produce rather than purchase his fruit and vegetables.

In the garden a gardener and his boy were busy shifting cauliflowers, and cutting off the asparagus stalks that had run to seed or rotted. This latter operation was being performed with preternatural gravity by an old young friend of ours—Little Corduroys. Old Worts was the gardener.

"Well, how's the buck?" said Dick, rather crossly, to the grandson.

"Why, it's dead," said Little Corduroys, looking up; "and you ought to give me another, you did; you've cheated me, you have. Mother says so."

"Cheated you, you greedy young beggar!" cried Dick indignantly; and in his rage he cut at Little Corduroys with an asparagus stalk he had picked up to have a fencing bout with Percy. "It's you that cheated me, and now you've starved my poor buck, confound you!"

And Dick gave Corduroys another lash. The small gardener doubled his podgy little fists, and was going to fly at his assailant, when, hearing his grandfather call out, "You leave my boy alone, will yer?" and seeing him stalking up with a very angry face, Little Corduroys elected to do battle by champion rather than in person, and began to whimper.

"What's all this?" demanded Old Worts.

"Why, he's been a-beatin' of me, and a-callin' of me names, and a-interruptin' of me in my work," sobbed Little Corduroys.

"What's all this? I say," sternly repeated Worts.

"Why," answered Dick, haughtily, "the little beggar said I'd

"'What's all this?' demanded Old Worts."

cheated him because he's starved or poisoned or something my poor buck that he cheated me out of. So I gave him a hit, and I'll give him a licking, if he's cheeky."

"Don't you call my grandson names, young sir," growled Worts; "and you keep your hands off him, or maybe you'll feel the weight o' mine on you—though, p'r'aps, it's lucky for ye I come up, or he might ha' licked you instid o' you lickin' him. You give him a rabbut becos' you nigh drownded him—that's your notion o' the vally of a poor boy's life, though maybe yourn ain't o' more count; and you give him a stupid old thing as you knew ood soon die—there's your giniros'ty. But we don't want your rabbuts! I'll buy him twenty time a finer 'un. And you just leave him alone, and let him goo on wi' his work like a sens'ble, indust'rous lad, instid o' idlin' away his time a-doin' nothin' but mischief like them as call theirselves young gen'lemen. *I* see ye on the roofs, and so I'll let your father know, Master Percy, if there's any complaint made. You pretty nigh hit me once. If you had, I'd ha' welted ye, young gen'lemen as ye are.—They call you Bantam, I've heered, young sir," Old Worts went on to Dick, "and it's an oncommon good name, 'cept that you've only got the crow and the strut, and none o' the pluck. I s'pose you think yerself a mighty fine feller, 'cos the tiger nigh gobbled ye. I worn't there, but they've told me all about it—how you squealed and was the colour of a taller candle, when the keeper lugged ye away by the nape o' yer neck like a drownded kitten. It must ha' bin as good as a play, though you might ha' stayed as you was for me."

And *that* was the version of his gallant conduct which the old miscreant pretended was current in the town! Not a word of his heroic dash in to the rescue! Dick turned and went away in a silent rage; Little Corduroys in a broad grin, and giving utterance to a very audible snigger; and even Percy, who, although very fond of Dick, was also rather envious of him, and liked to have him taken down a peg or two now and then, was, I fear, disloyal enough to grin slightly as he joined his friend; whilst the old gardener growled after them, "There, Mr. Bantam, you won't come cock-a-doodle-dooing here again in a hurry, I guess. You've had your comb cut for one while."

At the foot of the garden ran one of the branches of the town's river, more swiftly than usual because swollen by recent flood. Here they found Percy's brothers' boat pulling hard at the painter which tethered her to a post. She had a good deal of rain-water in her, and so they hauled her up to the bank to bale her out with

a handleless watering-pot and a rusty saucepan. When they had made her tolerably dry, Dick said—

"Oh, what fun it would be to have a row! Where are the oars, Percy?"

"John keeps them," answered Percy.

"Wouldn't he let you have them?" asked Dick.

"No," said Percy. "He wouldn't trust us by ourselves. If he hadn't been so busy he'd have given us a pull—he's better tempered than Jem and Fred—but they're all busy in the office just now about a will or a mortgage or something."

Although a solicitor's son, Percy did not know much more about law than his friend did.

"What a bother!" was Dick's comment on this state of affairs. "Why couldn't the people order their will, or whatever it is, another time? Does it take long to make?"

On this point Percy could give him no enlightenment.

So, for want of better amusement, they hauled the boat up to the post, and then let the current carry her down again, repeating the process until the painter broke, and down the stream went the boat, at times almost broadside on—a somewhat perilous mode of progression in a swollen stream. Past garden-walls, willows with drowned branches, arbours, boat-houses, bath-houses, littered yards, and little muddy wharfs with boats jostling about little wooden steps, the skiff was swept and spun out into the main stream of the river, where it was bumped against barges and at last jammed in a float of timber. A bargeman came to the boys' assistance, made their boat fast, and helped them across the up-and-downing logs, between which water washed, on to his barge, and so they got on shore. As they ran back to the Cedars by the least-frequented route they could find, a very disreputable couple of capless, damp, dirty, dishevelled little youngsters did they look. Mr. John, jun., met them, just after they had slipped in through the archway, and were making their way to the kitchen door. When he had heard their story, and learnt that the boat was all right, he had a good laugh at them, and then bade them make haste and titivate themselves somewhere. "They thought you were tired of us, Master Dick, and had run away back to school," he said, "and so they began tea ever so long ago. I was just going in to see if they had left any for me. There's such a lot

of them, and they take advantage of me because I'm the little one."

When the real little ones, after having tidied themselves to the best of their ability, crept in rather sheepishly to their tea—which in those days was an after-dinner meal, instead of a before-dinner diversion—those already busy with their cups and plates, and who had heard of the youngsters' escapade, greeted their entrance with a faint grin.

"You must excuse our not having waited for you, Master Abbott," said Mrs. Sharpe. "I know what boys are, and when I found that nobody knew where you and Percy were, of course I couldn't tell when you might be back."

"Never mind, Dick," said pleasant Mr. John, jun., who was afraid that his little brother's little guest might fancy that he was being made to understand that he was thought *de trop* under this, "Make yourself *quite* at home" mode of welcome; "the next time you come you and I will have a pull together. All the town is talking about your fight with the tiger, and I want to have a chat with you about the beautiful Miss Carter you risked your life to rescue."

After this, Dick, although not quite certain that the young solicitor might not have been indulging in a little—only a little—of what we nowadays call "chaff," could not help thinking Mr. John, jun., as nice a young man as he considered Worts an execrable old beast. This latter rendering of Dick's British behaviour was—no doubt, of course—the one which Brackenbury generally had accepted. It stood to reason that Mr. John Sharpe, jun., must know more about public opinion than an old gardener. Why, even those Misses Sharpe, big and little, had looked at Dick with some interest when their brother mentioned the tiger and Miss Carter.

The interest, however, very rapidly faded, and after tea Percy and Dick were left as before to do what they liked with themselves until they pleased, or otherwise, to take their share, with the other children, of fruit, nuts, and raspberry wine. It might have been thought that they could scarcely have got into any more mischief ere they were summoned to that refection, but so it was fated to be.

The cook went into the scullery to get some water, but on turning the tap no water came.

"Why, Jemimer," she exclaimed to one of her colleagues, "there ain't no water, and I know it's been turned on, for I see the man a-doin' of it in the street just now."

"Hadn't I better run arter him, or goo to his house?—where does the turncock live, Jane?" asked Jemima, with that love of an outing which has been a characteristic of servant-girls ever since they were first invented.

"What's the good o' askin' Jane where the turncock lives, Jemimer?" retorted the cook. "You must goo and tell the missis, you silly!"

"Well, you needn't git as hot as kyann pepper over it, Keziah," said Jemima, disappointed of an immediate rush out and a probable chat, conducted in a much more leisurely manner, with a member of the opposite sex.

"Has anyone been to look at the cistern?" asked Mrs. Sharpe, when she had heard the state of things.

"Lawks, no, mum!" answered Jemima, to whom the thought of examining before complaining had not occurred any more than it had to Keziah or Jane.

"Well, go and look, then, you silly child!" said her mistress.

Jemima came back in a state of consternation.

"Oh, mum," she exclaimed, flinging up her hands and eyes, "the water's bewitched! In it must ha' come, an' wanished, nobody knows how; for the ball's up, and yet there ain't a drop in the cistern."

The Grammar School boy looked up from his books with a glance of manly compassionate contempt for the weakness of woman's intellect.

"I'll soon get you some water, Jemima," he said, rising. He ran upstairs, followed by the servant, and the little boys, whom they met on the staircase, joined them. Fred vaulted out of the window which Jemima had opened to make her explorations, on to the roof of the office, on which the cistern stood. Of course Dick and Percy scrambled after him. What little boy could resist the temptation of getting out of a window on to a roof with nothing round it to keep him from falling off and breaking his neck?

"There, Jemima, don't you see?" said Fred, when he had pressed down the ball, and the water began to splutter out.

"The tap had got rusty, or something, and so the ball stuck—that was all."

Fred went down into the parlour to resume his studies, and Jemima into the kitchen to trumpet Mr. Frederick's uncommon cleverness. The boys lingered, watching the incoming of the water, and (for the first time) the action of a ball tap. When the ball began to rise, they pushed it back from time to time with a stick, and at last they pushed so hard that it stuck fast once more.

For a time the boys watched the rise of the waters without alarm, fancying that they would stop, so to speak, of their own accord before they overflowed their banks; but when they began to near the brink of the cistern, Dick made frantic efforts to hook up the ball, and in so doing tumbled into the cistern; and in trying to save him, Percy toppled after him; and then, to keep their heads above water, both boys caught hold of the ball-bar, and fixed it more firmly than ever in the wrong position.

Over went the water, running off the edges of the office roof, and leaking through its seams. Mr. Sharpe and his sons rushed upstairs, fished out the boys, and at last stopped the water, but a good deal of mopping was needed to clean up the slop in the office.

Mr. Sharpe was angry at having been interrupted in his evening's work, and hobbledehoy Jem because he had wetted his dandified clothes. But good-natured Mr. John, jun., who had got a good deal wetter, put in a word for the boys.

A servant had been sent to bring them dry clothes from Miss Lamblion's.

When they had dressed themselves, they fully expected that they would be at once marched back to school. Percy knew very well that if he had got into such a scrape by himself his punishment would have been a great deal heavier than mere deprivation of fruit and nuts and raspberry wine; and although Dick had generously taken all the blame upon himself, Percy still felt almost certain that he would "catch it" if he came in his father's way without the protection of his friend's presence.

Good-natured Mr. John, jun., however, came to the rescue of both, and they were permitted to partake of the evening banquet.

"Good-bye, Dick," said Mr. John, as they were going away. "Mind you don't get fished out of water much oftener, or else

people will say that you were not meant to be drowned, but to be ——you understand—and what would Miss Carter say then, poor thing?"

"A fine little chap, that," added Mr. John to his mother, when the door had closed upon the boys.

"Ye-es," very languidly assented Mrs. Sharpe. "He seems a nice little fellow in some things, but I don't think I shall ask him again. What a mess they have made!"

XXI.

THE ordinarily pleasant flow of life in the school was very unpleasantly ruffled. Things began to disappear in a most remarkable manner, from lockers (so called because they had no locks) in the schoolroom, from play-boxes kept in a room adjoining, and from the outbuildings devoted to live stock and lumber, big and little; and since the things could not have taken to themselves wings, or exhaled in vapour, or sunk into the ground like water into sand, it was plain that they could not have gone without hands; and therefore the mystery caused a very uncomfortable state of feeling. And besides, other things were done that seemed to show that the thief or thieves must have a spite against particular boys. Jam-pots, nearly full the night before, were found empty in the morning; marble-bags had been untied and made to pay tithe; a burning-glass was carried off; a bagful of bulls'-eyes had been scattered and a good many of them appropriated; a few sticky crumbs were all that remained of cakes of parliament; apples had been prodded with a skewer or had their insides scooped out; the packthread had been unwound from cricket bats; money-boxes had been tilted, and sixpenny pieces and shillings shaken through the slits and stolen; all the comfits had been picked off Bath buns; top-strings had vanished, brass button and all; draughtsmen and knuckle-bones were *non inventa;* in Saunders's set of chessmen, of which he was so proud because he pretended they were made of real ivory, a white queen and three white pawns, a red rook, bishop, and knight became conspicuous by their absence; Jackson's mouse-cage had been broken into and his white mice taken out, his double string of blown birds' eggs had been smashed; the loose peg of Mill's top had

been pulled right out; Dandy Diver's bottle of hair-oil, which he kept in his play-box that he might use it in play-hours, had been spilt over his light kid gloves which he was very fond of putting on at all kinds of effeminate times—but I should get tired of telling, and you of hearing, all the sly mischief that was done, and all the thefts that were committed.

At first the boys thought that some rascally stranger must come prowling about the premises at night—then they suspected poor Peter, to his great grief and indignation. If he'd the mind, he hadn't the time to steal, he said, almost sobbing—with all them boots and shoes to clean when his proper day's work was done.

At last the boys began to suspect one another, which was a very painful thing to them, since they had prided themselves on being in fact as well as name Miss Lamblion's Young *Gentlemen*, and looked down on fellows who could prig, more especially from their schoolmates, as low blackguards, vulgar sneaks not to be touched with a pair of tongs. Since Shum had been expelled, moreover, it had been supposed that no boy in the school would wreak his spite on another secretly, and *esprit de corps* at Miss Lamblion's was sorely wounded accordingly.

At first suspicions buzzed about in a vague tumult like swarming bees, but in a short time, as swarming bees settle on a bough, so the suspicions began to settle on one particular boy, and the weight of them nearly broke his heart.

This was little Edwin Leicester, a year or two older than Percy Sharpe, but scarcely taller, and not nearly so strong.

He had never been a favourite with his schoolfellows. He had light hair and blue eyes, which they were pleased to call, with ineffable scorn, "just like a girl's." His fair face, which illness and a feeble constitution had made very pale, was another reason for calling him Miss Nancy. He was the weakest boy in the school, and consequently contemptible in the eyes of younger boys. He never "took his own part," "stood up for himself," but quietly gave in when they put upon him; therefore, he was a coward. He took great pains with his lessons, and said them very well; therefore, he was a sneak. He did not care about play, or climbing, or running about, or making a noise, or doing open mischief, but moped away his play-hours reading and dreaming; therefore, he was a namby-pamby monstrosity of whom it was

very easy to suspect hidden evil. He had been incautious enough to let out on first coming to school that at home he played at dolls with his sisters, and that one of the dolls had eyes which could open and shut. Of course, he never heard the last of that. It was a sarcasm whose edge, in school opinion, no amount of repetition could dull to call after him, "Nancy, Sister Sukie wants you to come and nurse her doll. Walk the dear little crittur off to sleep. It won't shut its sweet, pretty eyes, but keeps on winking."

Miss Lamblion, getting to know of this, had told her pupils that a boy might play with girls—yes, and at dolls, too—and yet be a very manly fellow. Look at her cousin, the famous barrister, who would have been member for the borough if people had not been bribed and forced to break their promises,—hadn't he helped her to make dolls' clothes? and it would be a lucky thing for any boy amongst them if he turned out half as fine a man as her cousin, Mr. Serjeant Jollyboy, was in every way.

But Miss Lamblion could not always be at hand to take Leicester's part, and indeed, although she was proud of him in school-time, she wished he would be a little livelier in play-hours. Miss Lamblion liked brisk boys. If any of her pupils appeared dull at any time, she considered it a reflection on either her table or her temper.

With hot tongue and hard hand—at any rate, blows from it—would she, however, have come to the rescue, if she had been aware of one piece of persecution to which Leicester was subjected.

One day, having been roughly asked what he was blubbering for, he had unguardedly confessed that he had been thinking of his dead mamma, and thenceforth some of Miss Lamblion's boys (only a few, I am happy to say)—"big" boys who thought it manly to pelt toads and laugh at little fellows who were fond of their mothers—had been in the habit, though they *did* think themselves young gentlemen, of calling him "mammy-sick Molly." When floating dislike of Miss Nancy had crystallized into a conviction that he was a dastardly, spiteful prig,—"doing nasty things on the sly, *just* like a girl,"—it was decreed in solemn school council that he should be sent to Coventry. Leicester wondered at first at being left so much to himself, but he got very

little comfort out of it. The looks of silent loathing cast upon him were worse than open insults, and the little fellows at times could not refrain from interrupting the hush in which he moved with scornful whispers, as they went by him, of "I wouldn't be a sneak;" "I wouldn't be a thief;" whilst others, who would not break the *lex non scripta* which declares that a boy sent to Coventry must never be spoken to, talked *at* him in his presence with a quite sufficient intelligibility.

Miss Carter, noticing something of all this, questioned Dick about it, and he almost lost her favour when he told her the public opinion of the school, and almost boastfully, as if quite sure that his favourite teacher would side with him, announced his belief in its accuracy.

"Poor little fellow!" cried Miss Carter; "the boys ought to be ashamed of themselves. It's a cowardly thing to persecute him. He's a better boy than you, Dick, or any of them. I didn't think you could have been so mean, Dick. I thought you were a brave little boy that would have stood up for a schoolmate—especially a poor, sickly, harmless, gentle little fellow like Leicester—when all the rest of the school turned against him, for no reason whatever but their own wicked thoughts. Pray, why didn't they suspect you, sir? You're a great deal more likely to steal jam and smash eggs than Leicester is."

I do not know that Miss Carter exactly thought this, but just because she was very fond of Dick she was very vexed that he should have acted in a despicable manner,—however many of his schoolmates he had to keep him in countenance,—and so she gave him a good stinging piece of her mind, which made him feel very much ashamed of himself.

Miss Carter reported the matter to her principal, who instituted strict inquiries.

Not the smallest ground to found even the faintest legitimate suspicion of Leicester upon having been discovered, he left the court, as the police magistrates say, without the slightest stain upon his character, whilst, as for the other boys, Miss Lamblion expanded Miss Carter's indignant text into a still more indignant sermon, which made a good many of them turn burning red to the very tips of their ears, and wish that their schoolmistress would rather box the said ears, or give them a good caning, than

keep on double-thonging them at such a rate with that scornful tongue of hers. She felt that she was doing well to be angry, and considerably scarified the self-conceit of her young gentlemen.

But still the dastardly thief remained undiscovered.

The boys had taken some precautions against him, in the way of not leaving (except when they forgot) anything more valuable than school-books (which didn't matter) in their lockers, in locking their boxes, and not letting (except, again, when they forgot) any of their probable property lie exposed during their absence. But they did forget, and the spoiling in two senses still went on.

Moreover, the locked boxes had evidently been tried with some sharp instrument.

Miss Lamblion was very much annoyed. The affair seemed scarcely of importance enough to be put into the hands of the police, and yet it was very unpleasant to have a malicious person mysteriously doing petty mischief and committing petty thefts upon her premises. Besides, his or her taste for picking and stealing might grow until it became something a good deal more than simply very unpleasant for the objects operated upon.

After having vainly kept watch in person and by proxy, Miss Lamblion was beginning to think that she really must call the attention of the authorities to the matter, when one half-holiday afternoon, as she passed the schoolroom door,—the boys were out for a walk,—Miss Lamblion fancied that she heard a rustling. She peeped in cautiously, and there, fluttering under the overlapping edge of a locker-lid, she saw—a jackdaw. When it had succeeded in raising the lid, the bird slipped into the locker. Down came the lid, and, for a schoolmistress, most reprehensibly heedless of grammar (although I think the "Ingoldsby Legends" could scarcely have been published then), Miss Lamblion exclaimed, "That's him!" and running forward, put a Lemprière's classical dictionary and an Ainsworth on the lid of the locker, to secure the thief that had done this rascally thing, or rather series of misdeeds. Just then the boys filed into the playground. As soon as they had reached the schoolroom, Mr. Jack was first let out and then taken prisoner again. Fastened to his left leg by a thin ring there was a very light little metal plate, on which was engraved, in very tiny characters, this triplet:

"Catch my Jack
And bring him back,
And you shall have him, and whate'er you lack."

and the name and address of an eccentric old gentleman, reputed to possess a good deal more wealth than wit, who occupied the next house to Miss Lamblion's.

The jackdaw was carried by a deputation of the bigger boys to this old gentleman. "Oh!" he exclaimed, when he saw his bird, "you're caught at last, are you? I disown ye, you blockhead! You're getting old and stupid.

'Cassio, I love thee;
But never more be officer of mine.'

Take him, boys. Do what you like with him—wring his neck—do what you like with him, I say, except let him come stealing my things. If he does, I'll lock you up—that I will—lock you all up, and your schoolmistress, too, as sure as my name is John Jessop. What a fool you were to get caught, Jack! I'm sorry now I was christened John,—you've made me ashamed of the name, you dunderheaded blockhead. But here, boys, I said you should have back what he's stolen from you. Only mind you don't claim what isn't yours. Jack will soon find you out if you do, though he has grown a fool at stealing. Come along, boys."

Mr. Jessop led them to the hiding-place,—a hollow between rubbish behind a rotten, creeper-overgrown, earwig-haunted summer-house, in which Jack had long stored his ill-gotten gains. Jack went with them, tethered by the leg, on the arm of the oldest ambassador from the school. With his head on one side he watched the boys out of the corners of his eyes as they turned over his booty. When they took possession of any article they recognized he gave a hoarsely gurgling caw—in a voice not broken by conscience-stricken emotion, but chuckling with delight at thought of the adroitness with which he had effected the conveyance and so long concealed his plunder from any eyes save those of his old rogue of a master and accomplice, who had enjoyed his depredations.

The boys thought Jack good interest—by no means simple—to receive for their banked effects. He became the pet of the school at large, including little Leicester, who, although his character

had been cleared before, looked upon him as the real vindicator of it. Of course, Jack was kept a quasi-captive, but his was an honour-

"'Oh, you're caught at last, are you?'"

able captivity. He was let out at times, within safe limits, in order that he might amuse by his pilferings, attempted or com-

pleted, his young masters, who fancied themselves hidden from his ken. But Jack soon discovered that he was watched, and after exciting his watchers' curiosity to fever-pitch by the artful manner in which he prepared for a larceny, he would turn round, just when they thought he was going to accomplish it, give what looked very like a wink with his sly left eye, and hop or strut off, self-complacently croaking, "Ha! ha! *Did* they think that I didn't know they were looking at me?"

But now came preparations for the 5th November. Although, as I have said, Miss Lamblion stood by her cousin in his standing for the borough on Liberal principles, she was really very Conservative, and so she kept up the 5th in grand style, supplementing the boys' and teachers' subscriptions with an amount that enabled the school's display, both in the way of fireworks and bonfire, to be well worth inviting her pupils' and her own friends to witness. Mr. Reynolds was one of the invited, and acted as a kind of Master of the Ceremonies. The French and dancing masters were not invited, out of a feeling of delicacy, because they were Catholics. But on the occasion to which I refer, M. Appliqué, to Mr. Reynolds's disgust, invited himself; remarking, when it was explained to him that his name had been omitted from the invitation list simply because it had been thought that he might not like to assist at the cremation of a co-religionist, that it mattered not—M. Faux was not of his parents.

For a week before the eventful day the school had been in a state of flutter. Mr. Reynolds was entrusted with the duty of buying the fireworks. They were bought in instalments and locked up by Miss Lamblion in person, in what she believed to be a perfectly safe cupboard; but poor Mrs. Dow trembled when she passed it. Indeed, she did not recover her peace of mind until the morning of the 6th November dawned, and showed her that the house had not been blown up, and that none of her dearly-loved young friends had been turned into blackened, dismembered corpses, or maimed for life. Although, until the 5th came, the only sight that the boys got of the fireworks was *in transitu* to the closet, into which no light was allowed to be carried, and from which even the tinder-box was removed lest it should cause an explosion by spontaneous percussion, yet the consciousness of the fireworks being in the house gave an exciting

aroma of brooding gunpowder to its atmosphere. There lay the flower-pots, etc., all silent and unseen, that so soon would flash and fizz and roar and bang. It was like the hush before a thunderstorm. And then there was the more active excitement of cutting out and pasting the gores of fire-balloons, buying sponge and spirits of wine, making, padding, dressing, hatting, booting, painting, and pluming the Guy, and, if possible, smuggling in small private cargoes of serpents and such like for unexpected ignition when the public stock should be exhausted.

On the 5th Mr. Reynolds was invited to dinner, and a half-holiday was given. Of course there was to be no evening school, and next day, moreover, the boys were free from before breakfast lessons. Altogether the boys thought the Fifth a perfect gem of a holiday.

Shortly after dinner the high-piled cartload of faggots arrived, followed between the blue gates by curious street boys, who were with difficulty driven from the playground by Mr. Reynolds and Peter, and who held in utter scorn Miss Lamblion's young gentlemen's haughty indignation at their intrusion and impotent attempts to aid, or appear to aid, in their expulsion,—promising that *they'd* give it 'em when they caught 'em outside.

The faggots having been built up as symmetrically as possible into a stumpy cone, the Guy (a good deal taller than Mr. Reynolds —and handsomer, Miss Carter was wicked enough to say) was solemnly paraded with the usual rapid *recitativo* and hurrahs, and then carried into the stable there to wait—to the great bewilderment of the rabbits and other live stock—until the time came to fill his pockets and hollow portions of his person with fireworks, and then convey him to his post of honour on the top of the pile of wood, *there* to wait until the flames of the bonfire should cause him to blow up. Then the cook served out potatoes to the boys for roasting in the hot embers. This was supposed—or rather a sham was made of supposing so—to be done without Miss Lamblion's knowledge—to give, perhaps, a zest of "stolen waters, bread eaten in secret," to the tubers, which were in fact served out in very liberal quantity by Miss Lamblion's orders. Then came tea, at which "discipline" was most deplorably, or delightfully relaxed, and during which the boys had the excitement of hearing the rolling of wheels, the stamping of suddenly-pulled-up horses, the knocks and rings which announced the arrival of Miss Lamblion's

guests. The good-natured body, remembering how many Fifth-of-Novembers Mme. d'Enflure had spent in her service, and wishing to show that she bore no malice, had kindly included that cantankerous lady in her invitations, and had asked her to bring her little boys to take tea with her own pupils and afterwards share in their fun. But this kindly conduct Mme. d'Enflure, who had not then been humbled into sulky acceptance of Miss Lamblion's favours, had chosen to consider an insult. She wrote back, formally thanking Miss Lamblion, but adding that *her* pupils belonged to a class not in the habit of stooping to eleemosynary amusements, —that had their distinguished parents approved of such exceptionable entertainments they would, beyond doubt, have furnished her with *ample* means to provide them with a display *suitable to their position*. At the same time she begged again to thank Miss Lamblion, on behalf of her young gentlemen, though she feared that, under any circumstances, their distinguished parents might have objected to their making even temporary companions of young persons of a different rank from their own.

For a moment Miss Lamblion felt annoyed when she read this ridiculously ungrateful acknowledgment of her kindness. But it was *so* ridiculous that the next moment she burst out laughing.

"Poor Rachel!" she said, as she handed Madame's note to Mrs. Dow. "The silly creature is going downright crazy. I hope that lazy scamp of hers lets her have enough to eat, or hasn't driven her to drink. I am afraid we may have to take her out of the workhouse between us, Charlotte. Well, I daresay our boys will not miss the company of the young gentlemen of a different class. Poor little lads, though! It was a shame not to let them come and enjoy themselves."

Lord Skeleton Suit and his funny little brother peers certainly were not missed at Miss Lamblion's that evening, nor was their governess either.

Eccentric old Mr. Jessop invited himself, like M. Appliqué, to Miss Lamblion's show, but, of course, in a more eccentric manner. He seated himself, according to custom, on the wall that divided the playground from his garden, and watched all the proceedings of the evening with great delight, growling, however, to Mr. Reynolds, Peter, and the boys, when they passed him, that he had

firemen and constables on the premises, and would make Miss Lamblion pay smartly if any damage were inflicted on his property. M. Appliqué chancing to pass Mr. Jessop in the course of the evening, the queer old gentleman gave him the same information, which, by M. Appliqué, who had an imperfect knowledge of the English language, and an insufficient appreciation of Mr. Jessop's peculiarities, was construed into a threat against the property of his patroness. M. Appliqué's chivalrous feelings were aroused. He made a rush at Mr. Jessop, and exclaiming, "Zoo sall not damage de prop—er—tee of de good meess—vat zoo do dere?" he seized the old gentleman by the ankles, and toppled him backwards into his garden.

But this is anticipating matters. It was a capital night for fireworks—no moon, and though the stars shone brightly, they did not diminish the brilliance of the rockets, as they rushed up roaring, to break in many-coloured balls, falling stars, on the black sky. The Roman candles belched their less aspiring balls. Crackers bounced about like spit-fire imps. Squibs hissed through the air and banged overhead, or, falling before they burst, were seized as they lay shooting out their fiery tongues upon the ground, and flung up again to finish their career as became them. The playground was soon full of gunpowdery smoke, through which, with boom and bang and fizz, golden and ruddy fire could be seen rushing round in wheels, showering in fountains, cascading in fire-falls. Blue fire turned performers and watchers from wall and window into livid ghosts; green fire turned the buildings into emeralds, and the bare gravel into fairy grass; red fire bathed everything and everybody with its rich ruby tint; and then Jacks-in-the-box erupted like little volcanoes, with fierce explosion of their zigzagging ejected entrails. At intervals a fire-balloon was sent up, or an attempt was made to send one. Up and down the balloon was dapped to swell it out, the spirit-soaked sponge was attached and most gingerly lighted, and then the wind would drive the flame in upon the paper, and the balloon came to an ignominious end beneath trampling feet, or up it would rise in safety, just clear the chimney-pots and tree-tops, on which it seemed resolved to wreck itself, majestically mount up, up, up, and then burst into flames high overhead. Others, again, were borne away by the wind, with their spirit still burning properly when last seen, to

collapse at altitudes which their boastful makers calculated by miles, and drop their wire rings on the Jim Crow hats of startled rustics in far-distant fields. The time for lighting the bonfire arrived; Guy, with escort as before, was brought from the stable to his funeral pile, and placed upon its apex by Mr. Reynolds, who all the evening had been—he hoped Miss Carter would believe—risking life and limb in the most dashing style for her special gratification.

The faggots were kindled, and soon sent out bright flames, which lighted up the scowling, sinister features of the heavily be-plumed and be-booted victim to justice. "A—ha!" cried good-natured little M. Appliqué, "ver fine man, M. Faux; you oder Pro—tes—tan burn him for his beautee!"

Presently the fire caught the Guy, and in a few minutes he exploded, and the flames swallowed him in their red jaws. Then, when the fire began to sink, came the time for which Mr. Reynolds had been longing. Followed by the boys (who, however, cared more for spectators' admiration in the general than the particular), he jumped over the flames, looking up at the window at which he thought Miss Carter was standing (but she wasn't) with an air intended to express, "Thus, dearest, would I leap through a far fiercer conflagration to rescue thine ecstatic charms." Mr. Reynolds taunted his rival, as he chose to consider M. Appliqué, with timorousness because he had not followed him.

"Vat say zoo?" exclaimed the fat but valiant little Frenchman. "*Mais oui*—I vill jomp."

And jump he did, but unfortunately came down in a sitting posture before he had quite cleared the fire. The boys soon pulled him up and out, though Mr. Reynolds, I fear, would have been inclined to leave him there to grill.

The drawing-master was punished for his rancour when he went indoors, athirst for refreshment but still more hungry for applause. He heard Miss Carter complimenting M. Appliqué on his agility, but all that she had to say to *him* was that she thought it was mean of him not to help the French master up, just because he was jealous of his superior skill in jumping!

When the boys had had their supper they ran out to put their potatoes into the embers of the bonfire; and as soon as they were up in the morning they ran out to eat them.

But the potatoes were still raw; although no rain had fallen, the wood ashes were cold and wet.

It was easy to guess what enemy had done this, and it was soon discovered that old Jessop, who had seen the potatoes put in, had sent one of his servants over the wall to quench the embers, as soon as the boys had gone to sleep, in revenge for the tumble which M. Appliqué had given him.

XXII.

Old Jessop had never been a favourite with the school before, owing to his refusal to restore lost balls and other unneighbourly practices, but now the boys declared open war against him. Their first act of hostility could scarcely be commended for its acute strategy. They pelted old Jessop's arbour with their uncooked potatoes. When the bombardment had ceased, the old fellow, who had been lying in wait like an old spider, chuckling over the boys' disappointment, put his head above the wall and thanked his young friends for their kindness in saving him the trouble of ordering potatoes for some time to come. The boys' next attack was made in the evening with small arms. At dusk they peppered the old man's windows overlooking his garden so smartly with their peashooters, that not only old Jessop, but his servants also, thought that a sudden hailstorm had come on.

This mode of persecution was kept up for a night or two. Old Jessop's usual sitting-room was a back parlour on the first floor, and it was his habit to sit by the fire there in the evening without pulling down the blinds or closing the shutters, in the enjoyment of a cheroot and whisky toddy. The blazing fire betrayed all his movements to his enemies; and just when he was lighting his tobacco, or about to knock off the long white ash, when he was pouring in the boiling water or the spirit, dropping in the sugar, or raising the tumbler to his lips to take the first taste of a completed brew, there would come a sudden rattle of "hail," which made the old man jump, frequently to the detriment of his glass and ingredients. But a youngster could not resist the temptation of taking a shot by daylight at the old gentleman's bald pate as he aired himself upon his balcony. His eye fell upon the marksman, and being quick in putting this and that together, round came old

Jessop in a furious rage to complain to Miss Lamblion of the abominable manner in which he had been pestered with peas by her pupils, and to demand that they should be instantly flogged all round, volunteering to perform the office of executioner. Miss Lamblion did not accept his offer, nor did she cane her boys herself; but she confiscated their pea-shooters for the rest of the half —an act of rigour which made some of the boys begin to grumble against her also.

Mr. Jessop was next annoyed by sunlight flashed in his face, when he was napping, with bits of looking-glass (a proposal to set his whiskers on fire with a burning-glass had been scouted as impracticable), but sunshine is so scarce in November that this mode of harassing the enemy could be very rarely resorted to. Some of the bigger boys proposed to invade the enemy's territory (*i.e.*, garden) and lay waste his fields (*i.e.*, beds), but when it was known that the garden was guarded by a fierce, unchained, and unmuzzled big dog, no one would volunteer for the service. The old gentleman had his washing done at home, and the clothes dried in his garden; and one end of the line being fastened to a tree within reach of the playground wall, Dick was hoisted on to a big boy's shoulders, that he might climb on to it and untie the knots. He did so, and the whole swaying spread of spotless, dripping linen came down with a squelch upon the muddy ground. Dick was not caught, but seen, *in flagrante delicto* by the laundress who came to help the servants on washing-days, and so savage was she (if she *had* caught Master Dick, I am afraid there would have been very little of him left to be sent home at Christmas), that, not heeding the fact that Dick by his naughtiness had secured her an extra job, for which she would get extra wages, she went at once to Miss Lamblion, and made her charge—she'd seed one o' the young imps do it with his own hands—with her own eyes she had! So spake the irate washerwoman, fuming like her own copper. The school having been collected, and the culprit commanded to stand forth, Dick at once took the blame upon himself, saying nothing of the boys who had put him up to the trick and on to the wall to perform it. Thereupon Master Dick "caught it warmer" than he had ever caught that unpleasant "it" before; although not so warmly as he would have done had not Miss Lamblion felt quite certain that it was not a single-handed piece of mischief he

had been engaged in. His pocket-money, too, she stopped, to make some compensation to Mr. Jessop's servants—she knew very well that their master would not think of doing any such thing—for the additional work imposed upon them.

Dick felt the loss of his pocket-money a good deal more than his flogging, and was half disposed to join the party of malcontents. It was only his love for Miss Carter which restrained him. I am afraid that she—although, as one of the authorities, bound to maintain their influence—was guilty of a sad sapping of discipline—to wit, that of secretly offering to lend (which, of course, meant giving) Dick any money he might want before old Jessop's servants' claims were satisfied.

The dividing wall between garden and playground being still made a basis for hostile operations, Miss Lamblion, wearied out by the complaints continually brought her by her neighbour, ordered a rope to be stretched from one end of the playground to the other, at a distance of six feet from the wall, and forbade, under severest pains and penalties, any of her pupils in any way to get over or to get under it.

Just then dreary, drizzling weather set in, which, under ordinary circumstances, would have indisposed the boys to go into the playground at all; but the weather telling on their tempers, they chose to consider it a great grievance that this strip of playground should be forbidden to them, and the party of malcontents was largely recruited.

Next, one of old Jessop's back windows was broken by a stone thrown manifestly from Miss Lamblion's playground; but when the school was again mustered, and inquiry made, no one would own that he was the thrower. Thereupon Miss Lamblion made proclamation that until confession was made by the offender, or information given concerning him, there should be no more half-holidays.

This was a terrible punishment; but the offender would not confess, and partly from fear and partly from loyalty, no one thought of peaching. The boy who had thrown the stone was Sam Lawrence, the then captain of the school, who was also its first cock. He was tolerably popular, and, besides, could indubitably lick any two other boys,—not one down the other come on, but both together.

Saturday was the first day on which the dread ordinance came into force, and very dismal did the boys think it, instead of feeling that the load of another week's work was off their back, to be marched from the dining-hall into the schoolroom, there to peg away at their books all the afternoon under the awe-inspiring oversight of Miss Lamblion; for not wishing to punish her teachers as well as her pupils, she had determined to mount guard over her prisoners herself. From school they were marched in to tea, and then straight back to work again.

It was dreadful, and Lawrence feared that his subjects' allegiance could not long stand such a strain.

He had read "Barring Out," and during the leisure of Sunday took counsel with the other big boys, and a conspiracy was formed, which the little fellows were to be either coaxed or compelled to join. Miss Lamblion's young gentlemen also would have a barring out, and never give in until the tyrannical edict had been rescinded.

The order was passed amongst the boys to secrete as much food as possible; cakes and so on were conveyed from the box-room to the bedrooms, and additional stores were smuggled in from the town by the few day-boys Miss Lamblion condescended to take. For firing the conspirators were unable to make provision, but they reasoned that if they felt cold it would be easy for them to get warm again by getting into bed.

By Wednesday night all their arrangements were completed. With exultant hearts they marched up to bed after their day-long drudgery. On the morn the die was to be cast, the Rubicon to be crossed, the flag of rebellion to be hoisted, the gauntlet of defiance to be thrown down.

The boys' sleeping quarter was entered by the little fellows' dormitory, whose stout door connected it with, or cut it off from, the rest of the house. The quarter included this dormitory, the big boys' room, the clothes and linen room, and the lavatory, so that the insurgents were well supplied with water.

Captain Lawrence rose early, and having posted a sentry at every window, proceeded, with the assistance of others of his men, to barricade the little fellows' dormitory door. It was locked and bolted, and then bedsteads in a double line were placed against it. It had before been pierced for musketry; *i.e.*, the chink at the top

had been somewhat widened for the insertion of the nozzles of squirts.

The calling-up bells rang, but rang unheeded. The boys, who were not up before, comfortably awaited the course of events in their beds. Presently the handle of the dormitory door was tried, and Miss Carter's gentle voice was heard saying in a surprised tone—

"Why, boys, what trick is this you're playing? Open the door at once."

"Miss Carter," answered the captain most courteously,—he fancied himself a *chevalier sans peur et sans reproche*,—"we have no grudge against you, or Miss Drummond, or Mrs. Dow, but no one will enter here until Miss Lamblion has promised on her word of honour that we shall have our half-holidays again."

"I know Dick Abbott will let me in," said Miss Carter, and Dick, although a sworn conspirator, could not help starting up in bed.

"If Abbott would, he could not, Miss Carter," remarked the captain. "It is of no use your remaining there. We have no wish to inconvenience you, and therefore I may as well tell you at once, that we can only treat with principals,—I mean Miss Lamblion."

"I'll treat with them, the saucy young monkeys!" exclaimed that lady, when she had heard the news; and having hastily finished dressing, she stalked upstairs attended by Miss Drummond, Miss Carter, and terrified Mrs. Dow, and followed by the amused women-servants and stolidly wondering Peter. A speculation, too dim to be called a hope, floated or crawled across his sluggish brain.

"If," he thought, "the young gentlemen could only hold out for a day or two, why then I shouldn't have so many boots and shoes to clean."

For this reflection in their favour Peter was very ungratefully rewarded by the insurgents.

"Peter," cried the captain, who was peeping through a side chink of the door, "we can only meet you in the open field of battle; we cannot admit you to the council-chamber. Retire!"

But Peter lingered.

"My men, do your duty," said the captain. "Take good aim,

and mind you spare the women. And Peter had to retreat before a converging fire of squirtery.

"Open the door this instant!" thundered Miss Lamblion.

"The very instant, madam, you promise that we shall have our half-holidays," replied the captain.

"Open the door this instant!" almost screamed Miss Lamblion, "or I'll have it wrenched off its hinges."

"The hinges are on the inner side, madam," the captain tranquilly pointed out.

"I'll have it smashed in with crowbars and axes," threatened Miss Lamblion.

"We will defend the pass to our last breath—the last drop of our blood. We are all sworn to do or die," was the captain's heroic response.

Miss Lamblion drew off her forces, greatly nettled, and temporarily discomfited. Her fierce mandates having failed to cow the rebels, what must she do next? She wished to injure neither her property nor her prestige. It would never do for people to be able to say that there had been a mutiny at Miss Lamblion's, which she had not been able to put down without calling in strange men to smash her doors and break her pupils' heads. No, she must summon no alien auxiliaries, but trust to her own resources, and keep the whole affair as quiet as possible. Fortunately the dormitories were at the back of the house. It was not simply for its market value that Miss Lamblion was jealous of her prestige. She was a very proud old, or middle-aged, lady, and would not for the world have had her neighbours believe that her boys had both defied and beaten a person of her strength of mind and stoutness of heart.

An alarm was given in the boys' quarter that a ladder had been placed against one of the windows, and that Peter was coming up. He was allowed to come half-way up, and then the window was raised, and he was bucketed down, looking very much like a half-drowned rat. His mistress ordered him to try another window. Again the sash was thrown up, the top of the ladder was seized, and poor Peter, in spite of his terrified clinging, was nearly shaken off. When he had reached the ground in safety, again was the ladder shifted, and, most reluctantly, he was again compelled to mount it. Again was the threatened window opened,

but a different line of tactics had been decided upon by the captain. Peter was allowed to reach the top of his scaling ladder unmolested, but just as he had got half of his body inside the besieged fortress, he fell into an ambuscade. Big boys fell upon him, flung him on the floor, and fastened his legs and arms to bed-posts with small cords. Peter, when he found that all chance of retreat had been cut off, through the ladder's having been flung down into the playground, made a very passive prisoner.

Then came a cessation of hostilities, and the besieged took breakfast, chivalrously untying one of their captive's hands that he might share their meal. Perhaps some of the besieged thought that their ordinary breakfast in the warm hall would have been more comfortable,—cold water in November is rather a tooth-achey breakfast beverage—but "No surrender!" was still the cry of all. They were still valorously resolved to vindicate their rights in the matter of half-holidays.

Peace lasted so long that treachery was feared, and the sentries were ordered to redouble their vigilance.

At the hour when the drawing lesson was due, steps were heard coming up the stairs, and scouts, peeping through the door chinks, reported that Miss Lamblion was returning to the assault, at the head of her former troops, minus Peter, but reinforced by Mr. Reynolds.

Mr. Reynolds talked very big, but there was something in his tone which convinced the boys that they had nothing to fear from *him*. They applauded his magniloquent speeches with derisive cheers, which made not only Miss Carter, but Miss Drummond also, find it a very hard matter to refrain from smiling, whilst the servants giggled outright, and then glanced anxiously at their mistress, in fear lest she, goaded into fury, might, with a back-hander, sweep them to the bottom of the staircase. Stung to the quick, the drawing master made a mad-bull rush at the dormitory door. "Try it again, sir," remarked Captain Lawrence, encouragingly.

As Mr. Reynolds drew back to repeat, or sham to repeat, his attack, the captain gave this order to his squirteers: "*Feri in faciem*—aim at his shirt-front, my lads." Mr. Reynolds was a bit of a dandy. His snowy wristbands as well as worked front were rendered disgustingly flabby and soppy by the well-directed fire,

and, notwithstanding the inspiring presence of Miss Carter, he fell back in confusion. Again there was a lull. The besieged ate their dinners unmolested. Their prisoner, who now was allowed to have both hands free, began to enjoy life, and was far less anxious than his captors, who were troubled with this thought, Will she send for the drill sergeant? He was not due until the next day, but perhaps Miss Lamblion might at once summon him to her aid, and he would be a very different foe from any they had yet encountered; but peradventure they might be able to buy him off, as the Saxons bribed the Danes; and so to prepare for this contingency the captain at once levied *Danegeld*. However, they were not again disturbed until the time came for M. Appliqué to make his appearance.

Soon the sentries announced that Miss Lamblion was helping Mossoo to raise the ladder. No attempt was made to prevent them; but when Mossoo had mounted a few rungs, the ladder was so shaken, that the plump little Frenchman dropped to the ground like a windfall plum. In wrathful scorn, like an offended goddess, Miss Lamblion approached the ladder. She began to ascend it, whilst the besieged looked on in wondering awe. This was a state of things which they had not contemplated. They had never dreamt of coming into personal collision with their governess or any female member of her staff. She gained the top of the ladder without any attempt at resistance being made, broke a pane in the reclosed window, undid the snack, raised the sash, and—well, not exactly leaped, but somehow got into the room. Notwithstanding the not very dignified mode of her entrance, a deeper dread came down upon the hearts of the rebels. The backbone of the mutiny was broken. She ordered Peter to be released—it was done. She ordered the ex-mutineers to assist him in unbarricading the dormitory door—it was done without a moment's hesitation. She ordered them to march down into the schoolroom. Down they huddled behind their captain like a flock of sheep behind the bell-wether.

In the schoolroom, Lawrence, thinking that he was sure to be expelled, and wishing to leave behind him a reputation for heroic generosity as well as valour, took upon himself the whole responsibility for the barring-out, and owned that it was he who had broken Mr. Jessop's window.

But Lawrence was not expelled. Miss Lamblion was so proud of having repressed the insurgents by her own right hand, that she contented herself with giving them all round a very long lecture, in which she held them up to merciless ridicule. Still, as they had got their half-holidays back by the confession of their captain, they came in time to look upon the barring-out as a master-stroke of policy. So indelibly, however, had the image of Miss Lamblion mounting the ladder impressed itself upon their memory, that they never again thought, even in dreams, of disputing her authority.

XXIII.

MISS LAMBLION'S boys bought their live stock of an old man of the name of Fogle, who also sold lollies and other schoolboy confectionery. When leave had been obtained to go out of bounds, old Fogle's was, as may be imagined, a favourite resort. Mr. Fogle not only sold live stock, but exchanged it also, and therefore sometimes made several profits out of a boy who had only once paid him down money. "If a young gentleman got tired of his pet," reasoned the old man, "and couldn't afford to buy another outright, it stood to reason that he couldn't expect to get as good a one in swop—what would be the good of that to *him?*"

Fogle, however, on the whole, was a favourite with the boys. He was very civil, and within certain limits tolerably ready to grant credit; and, besides, he did not object to non-buyers or exchangers (of course I do not mean of classes never likely to become such) making a lounge of his shop. His menagerie was certainly well worth looking at. It contained a few, but only a few, foreign birds, for in those days ship after ship did not bring them over from Australia and elsewhere in thousands. Canaries have long ceased to be foreign birds, as they were at the time when Queen Elizabeth slept in Minster Street. The pretty little strangers that came in when she reigned with turkeys and tobacco, nectarines and potatoes, have been made—or rather their descendants have—much prettier, in bird fanciers' estimation, and taught to sing better. The Spaniards thought they had the monopoly of the canary trade, because the little birds were too weak fliers to migrate from the Canary Islands, and no hens were allowed to be exported. But after a time they were bred in the Tyrol, Germany, Holland,

Belgium, York, Leicester, Norwich, Bethnal Green, Spitalfields—and I may add Brackenbury; since not only did old Fogle breed them, both the pure birds and mules, but also an old barber, whose red-and-white pole stuck out over the way just opposite. Fogle always went to be shaved at this barber's, but it was not simply the nearness of the shop that led him to do so: he had thus an opportunity of inspecting and depreciating his rival's stock, and growling at him for being an interloper, instead of a legitimate tradesman like himself. Bullfinches, too, Fogle taught, or tried to teach, to pipe; and as a kind of sign to his shop he hung out, in fine weather, an old goldfinch, blind of one eye, that drew its own water and helped itself to seed in an equally complicated manner. Livelier specimens of the race, linnets, chaffinches, and greenfinches, Fogle likewise included in his stock. His larks and thrushes, swelling out their speckled breasts as they fluttered their wings over their shamrocked sods and shook their straining throats, almost deafened him with their songs. He had blackbirds in roomy, cool-looking wicker cages, and blackcaps, redpoles, wrens, robins, and yellow-hammers, constantly hopping from perch to perch, at the risk of knocking their heads, in their close little wired deal boxes. Now and then he had a starling that could talk, or a still more communicative jackdaw or magpie, but these soon found purchasers. More rarely he had a raven, which sometimes was returned upon its seller's hands owing to its sly but spiteful pecks at the plump legs of little children, and other clandestine and malicious mischief. He sold sparrows for matches, and rats for hunting, often sending the latter to London close-packed in cages dangling from the hind boots of the up coaches.

He had always pigeons and poultry in stock, and sometimes a dingy, floundering, melancholy swan. Every one troubled with blackbeetles went to old Fogle's for a hedgehog. He sold squirrels, rabbits, guinea-pigs, white mice, ferrets, gold and silver fish, and fancy and fighting dogs. There were gamecocks among his poultry, for in those days, although, of course, no respectable person would own to it in public, cockfighting was still kept up on the sly in Brackenbury backyards. Bird-keepers old Fogle supplied with wool, artificial moss, turf, sand, German paste, seed, chickweed and groundsel, worms and snails. Worms and snails

again, minnows and little frogs, he sold to anglers for bait; big frogs and snakes to the only doctor in Brackenbury who was supposed to "keep up his reading;" toads to gardeners; and in short, if any one in town wanted "a country thing" they went to old Fogle's for it. Botanists and herbalists ordered plants of him, which he directed his birdcatchers to hunt for; and I might have said before that the nest of almost any British bird could be got at his shop, either fresh from tree, hedge, bank, tower, house-roof, chimney, hole in wall, or neatly set up in a box with the eggs ready blown.

You can guess, therefore, what a nice place the boys thought old Fogle's to look in at. Besides the birds, etc., to look at, to buy, or to barter, grown-up fanciers had dealings with old Fogle, and this made Miss Lamblion's young gentlemen fancy themselves quite sporting men. It became "the thing" to buy sweetstuff and gingerbread, etc., there, although far fresher could have been obtained from shops with far purer air in them.

Percy and Dick, as I have said, had the exceptional privilege of going into the town by themselves, or rather together—on the principle, I suppose, that two little chaps make one big fellow. One day they were at old Fogle's, seated on a hamper and greatly enjoying a just-purchased light refection of bull's-eyes, parliament, and apples (for the old man sold the produce of his garden also), when in came old Peters.

"Morning, young gentlemen," he said. "Morning, Master Dick. I hain't seen ye since you got the ducking. Hope you're none the wuss for it. But what are you a-doin' of now?—wastin' your substance in riotous livin'? You ought to be ashamed o' yourself, you did, Fogle, makin' your fortun' out o' the damaged constitooshuns o' young gen'lemen!"

Both old men grinned as Fogle answered, "I'm afeared, neighbour, nayther on us could start a coach an' six out o' the arnins we make from our young gen'lemen customers."

Bait for jack was old Peters's business. "No angler," says Lord Byron, "can be a good man;" and there does seem something cruel in hooking fish, when the fish are caught for sport merely, and at the cost of torture to other creatures; yet for all that the youngsters knew that Peters was a good old fellow, and by no means wished him

in his gullet
To have a hook and a small trout to pull it.

They did not, like his lordship, consider angling "a solitary vice, —the cruellest, the coldest, and the stupidest of pretended sports." They were members of the guild, and listened with great interest to the talk of their two Elder Brethren (for old Fogle likewise was a fisher) as old Peters picked out his frogs.

Presently the conversation turned to the dogs.

"That little King Charles yonder," said Fogle—"that there wi' the long ears and the blue ribbon—I'm in a bit o' trouble o' mind about, 'cos I can't rightly bring myself to believe that the chap I got it from come by it honest; and I on't have nought to do wi' dog-stealin', or findin', as they calls it. Let alone its bein' sneaky to my thinkin' to help to rob them as supports the fancy you live by, that dodge ud never do for my connection—oodn't pay, sir. So, if Mister Bob did steal the dog, I'll blow on him precious quick if it's found out. He sha'n't come tryin' to take away my character for nothin'. There, you see, I've put the dog in the empty parrot's cage, right outside the door, so as any one goin' by as owns him can claim him, and have him too, by payin' me down just what I give Bob for him. I won't even charge for its keep, if I don't have to keep him too long without findin' a buyer for un. I've my character to support, and precious soon I'll set any one on the scent of Mister Bob, if there's any inquiries about the dog. I hain't made him no promises to the contrary—why should I?"

Dick especially had listened to this account, and looked at the dog concerned with an interest far greater even than the angling conversation had excited, because he had been reminded of the following passage in a quite recent letter from his sister Annie:—"To make up for the poor things that were burnt in the barn, papa has bought us each something. I am not to tell you what yours is. Papa says he wants to see whether Susie and I can keep a secret until Christmas. I am sure Lily wants to tell quite as much as we do, only she pretends she does not, because she thinks that makes her look grown-up. Mine is such a dear little love of a King Charles's spaniel, with ears hanging down almost to the ground, and such a funny little blunt nose. It is so fond of me already; and barks and growls and tries to bite me if I give it its breakfast, only half a ha a quarter of a minute too late."

"My sister has had a King Charles's spaniel given to her," said Dick.

"But has she lost it?" asked Fogle.

"I don't know. It was only a day or two ago I heard she had got it. You haven't had this one long, have you?"

"No."

"Then, please, don't sell it till I have written home. I am sure if it is Annie's, papa will give you what you gave the man for it, and he'll pay for its keep, too."

"Where does your papa live?" asked Fogle.

"Why, at Foxearth—he's clergyman there," answered Dick, in some wonderment. He had thought that everyone must know that he was the son of the Vicar of Foxearth.

"Phew!" cried Fogle. "You write home by all means, young gentleman. Bob shall find he's caught a Tartar if he has let me in so near home as that."

And then the two old men began to talk about Bob again.

"It's Bob Haste you know," said Fogle. "He's a Brackenbury man by birth, but he's al'ays been makin' the town too hot to hold him. Its air don't suit him, he says; his physician has ordered him to have a change—he's a comical chap, though he is a rogue—and so he has spent a good bit more of his life out of Brackenbury than in it. And yet his father was a respectable man, and so was his mother—leastways woman. It's hard to say who Bob takes after. Last time he was doin' anythin' settled in the town—if you may call it so—he was a kind of a hostler's help at the Three Tuns. But that didn't suit him long,—his old complaint come on, and he'd to be on the move again; all sorts of things I've heared he's turned his hand to—in the way of thievin' of them. Before he knew I fought shy o' such gentry he let out how he could lure dogs. I held my tongue for a bit, and it was astonishing to see how he brought one in off the street, just by rubbing his hand over its muzzle. It come arter him like a foal trottin' arter its dam. Then I spoke out. 'Don't you bring me no dogs that fashion,' says I. 'This ain't your shop.' 'Why,' says he, 'there's on'y the trouble o' takin' it in till there's a reward offered, and then you'd have best share.' 'An' if there ain't no reward offered?' says I. 'Why then,' says he, 'in course it oodn't do to offer 'em for sale close handy, but there's a market

for 'em in Lon'on, and if there ain't there, it's easy to ship 'em off. Dogs is a wentur' the steamboat chaps are fond on—that's to say, if there's money safe to be made off 'em.' When he found I'd have nothin' to say to the business, he began to laugh, and made out as he'd only been tryin' to see how much I'd take in, but I knew better. Now what I've been thinkin' is—for all the fine story he told me about the span'el bein' give him by a man as bred 'em instead o' money owed—what I've been thinkin' is as that King Charles is one as he stole t'other side o' Lon'on, and 'cos he couldn't get his price for it there he brought it down to Brackenbury. He'd never, it's my belief, have stolen a dog so nigh home as Foxearth to try to sell to me—and a good price he stood out for, too. And there's worse tricks than dog-stealin', I'm afeared, Bob has been up to. He's the kind o' chap it wouldn't be convenient to meet in a dark lane, if you'd money about you, and he knew you couldn't lick him. If he thought you could, he'd have nothin' to say to you, for Bob was al'ays one for lookin' after his own skin."

When Dick had heard all that there was to be said about Bob, he was for hurrying Percy away, that the letter home might be written at once, when in came old Worts and Little Corduroys.

"Oh, you're here, are ye, Mr. Bantam?" said the gardener. "Come to fight a ferret, have ye, because the tiger nigh gobbled ye? But I doubt that would be one too many for ye. Better pitch into a rabbut. That looks a soft un to hit. Off wi' your coat an' go in at 'n."

Old Peters, however, would not allow anyone to criticize his young friend except himself.

"Hold your sour old tongue, Worts," he said. "Master Dick did what you dursn't ha' done, you old winegar-cruet! nor many other men, nayther. I wasn't at the show, but my daughter was, and the whole town calls him a brave little feller."

"Ay, brave enough to push my little lad into a well," growled Worts; "and then, 'cos he's such a gin'rous young gen'leman, to gi'e him a dead rabbut to make amends."

"It wasn't dead," cried Dick, colouring.

"Noa, but you knew right well that it wor a-gooin' to die," went on his tormentor.

"I didn't," exclaimed Dick; "but as you make out you believe

so, I'll buy him another as soon as I've got enough money. I haven't much now, because my pocket-money has been stopped."

"Ay, ay, it's convenient to have your pocket-money stopped when you've got to make a present," sneered Worts.

"I haven't *got* to make a present, but if you want one, and must have it at once, I daresay Mr. Fogle will trust me," said Dick.

"That I would," answered old Fogle; "but not to buy another rabbit for the little boy."

Fogle had heard the whole story of the buck, and knew very well that Miss Lamblion's young gentlemen's custom was and would be (though he *had* joked about it) vastly more profitable to him than old Worts's had been or was ever likely to be; therefore, he promptly chose his side.

"Look'ee here, Worts," he said; "it was all a accident, and the young gen'leman did his best to help get the little boy out, and give him the only bit o' money he had, and as fine a double-lop, butterfly-smut buck as ever I had in my shop. So I say as he behaved *as* a gen'leman, and no more ought to be expected on him, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself to ask it, Worts, you ought. And Mr. Peters is of the same opinion, I'll wentur' to say."

"My grandson don't want rabbuts bought un, though they was promised by young gen'lemen as remembers they can't afford 'em," snarled Worts. "*I* can afford to buy him twenty times a finer un than any the young gen'lemen have got."

"I can show you some very fine ones, Mr. Worts," said Fogle, softening his tone; "but you will find it hard work to do that. It really was a remarkably fine buck. *I* couldn't have found it in my heart to give away such a beauty. It is a pity that your little boy did not take more care of it."

Although Dick now started for school, leaving Worts still on the field of battle, he thought with justice that he had marched out with colours flying and all the honours of war.

Dick's letter about the spaniel reached Foxearth next morning, and in the course of the day Floss pulled up in front of the school-house with Mr. Abbott behind her. He brought news that Annie's pet *had* been stolen. Of course he readily obtained permission for his son to accompany him to Fogle's, where he at once recognised the little dog, and ransomed it in so liberal a manner that the old man's wrath against Bob roared like a furnace. Although talking

to a clergyman, he swore that he would be even with the rascal ere long, and that he would at once send word to Foxearth of his reappearance in or about Brackenbury, in order that he might at once be brought to justice.

Of course, as Englishman, clergyman, and magistrate, Mr. Abbott desired this, but just then he was thinking more of the consolation he would be able to give his poor weeping little Annie at home, whither he soon took his departure, with Fido snuggling under a horse-cloth, and the apron upon his knees. Before he drove off, Dick was delighted to find that the fame of the tiger adventure had spread abroad in Foxearth, and that not a whisper of the barring-out had reached the village. For her own sake as well as the boys' Miss Lamblion had quite hushed up that business.

The days were now drawing in to their shortest, the nights drawing out to their longest, and dark nights they were, even for December. Reports of robberies came in from the country round. Lonely farmhouses had been broken into, farmers stopped on their road home from market, a turnpike had been pillaged, a doctor had been called up in the small hours, and then knocked down on his road to a sham patient—but the robbers had not taken much by that trick, since the doctor had carried neither purse, watch, chain, ring, nor pin with him. Then came stories of very tall women—of course, men in women's clothes—not waiting for night, but calling at detached houses at dusk, when the masters were absent, or were known to be old or ill—intruders who would thrust their great boots between the door and the post, force their way in, and either lay hands on anything they could carry off, or else bully the terrified inhabitants into bribing them to go away. Next, emboldened by impunity, they entered, or tried to enter, houses in the outskirts of Brackenbury. Miss Knight's was broken into, and our little friends were delighted to hear that her gruff man had not shown nearly so much pluck on the occasion as her good maids Tryphena and Tryphosa. And next—all Brackenbury stood aghast at the impudence of the rascals—they marched into its very heart: committed burglary in Minster Street. It was Mr. Mace's house they broke into, but here they were defeated—not by Mr. Mace and his young men, but by the gallant Professor, aided by the grocer's wife, The Professor armed himself with his

rapier, and lunged at the villains most desperately, whilst Mrs. Mace emptied water-jugs over them from a stair top, and then flung the jugs down with a smash upon their heads.

The crash and the nasty jagged wounds the broken jugs gave them, the unexpected shower-baths, and the Professor's pungent pinkings utterly routed the robbers.

The day after he had beaten off the burglars the Professor had to give his lesson at Miss Lamblion's. There he was loudly complimented on his heroism, but found that the attempt on such a house as the grocer's, with houses joining on to it, had thrown most of the ladies into a state of great alarm. They had not much faith in the valour of poor Peter; and, besides, what could even the bravest of shoeblacks do against a band of desperadoes? The boys also were in a state of great excitement—of course, only excitement. If, at times, they trembled, it was no doubt simply with noble eagerness to fly at the throats of the troublers of Brackenbury's peace. Mrs. Dow, Miss Drummond, Miss Carter, and the women-servants would have been very glad if such a champion as the Professor would have taken up his abode with them, and perhaps Peter, although he would not own himself frightened, would not have objected to an ally; but Miss Lamblion scoffed at the notion of additional male aid. She had kept school all those years, she said, without any men folk except her boys and her boy, and she was not going to be afraid now. A boys' school, she said, was the last place robbers would think of attacking, next to a girls' school, because of the number of shrill voices in it—enough to wake a cityfull of folk, or rouse a whole country-side.

But although the good governess talked in this cheery style, she could not communicate her courage to her household.

If the robbers had broken into Mace's right in the middle of the town, what house might they not attempt? And Miss Lamblion's, although not exactly in the outskirts of the town, was very near them. It stood where houses began to thin and become detached like itself. Its neighbours had long gardens at the back, running parallel with its own playground, and the back wall that bounded all these had on the other side a little-frequented lane with only a few cottages in it, and grass land and a brickfield beyond. Those of the servants whose turn it was to stay at home on Sunday night

locked and barred all the back entrances as soon as the school had filed into the playground on the way to church, and saw, in company, to the snacking of windows all over the house. And when the school came back, both teachers (Miss Lamblion, of course, always excepted) and boys—half—quarter—an eighth—at any rate, a sixteenth—expected to find the rear of the premises breached, and the scanty garrison lying about "promiscuously" with their throats cut or their brains blown out, or feared the robbers might have stowed themselves under beds, away in cupboards, and far queerer hiding-places than the oil jars of the Forty Thieves.

After all, though, the robbers were no laughing matter. It was evident that they had local knowledge and London skill. The local constabulary were entirely baffled. Brackenbury at large was thrown into perplexed panic, but Fogle swore, as confidently as if he had been a police-bribed accomplice, that Bob Haste was "in it—at the bottom of it." Although not an accomplice, Fogle was about right.

Fear reached such a height of terror, and the police such a depth of paralysed inefficiency, that a kind of Vigilance Committee was formed. The chief tradesmen of the town were sworn in as special constables, to patrol the streets by night. Mr. Mace was one of these constables, and a good many of the others were about on a par with that good grocer in gallantry. The Specials walked their by no means lonely rounds in such very large aggregates, and kept so very close together—of course, only to keep one another warm in that very inclement weather—that the burglars must have been the most reckless, or the most bungling, of their kind, if they had allowed themselves to be surprised in their operations by forces so powerful *en masse*, although possibly not so formidable in detail. The chief of the local constabulary followed *his* chief the mayor's lead in "keeping his men well together"; and, indeed, the small regular force and the far more numerous volunteers were generally in close proximity during their nocturnal "feeling" for the enemy; an excellent arrangement if the enemy could only have been felt, but not quite the best adapted for detective purposes.

One night Dick shook Percy, whispering, "Wake up—wake up, I say, they've come at last!"

"Stuff and nonsense!" answered Percy, sulky at having been roused out of his sleep, and by no means inclined to be called upon to exchange continuing it between his warm blankets for having to do anything in the outside cold.

Dick jumped out of bed, ran into the big fellows' bedroom, and roused Captain Lawrence; and he, when he had made a reconnaissance from one of the windows, and dimly discerned, or guessed at, a human huddle at a door or window opening on the playground below, surging about in an attempt to do something, criticised with low growls, and suggested and encouraged with low mutterings, woke up the other big boys. "It's no good to wake the little chaps," he said, "unless we've to take to squealing. You're a game little bantam, Dick, but the others would begin to squeal too soon."

Notwithstanding the mock-heroics in which he was sometimes given to indulge, Lawrence had real cool pluck in him, and was not above adopting the strategy of Mrs. Mace. He ordered his "men" to arm themselves with the lavatory ewers and water-cans, and when he should give the word of command to empty the contents upon the enemy, and then to dash down the vessels upon the foe as hard as they could fling. "If that don't scare 'em." he continued, "make the most horrid yell you can invent. That'll wake the little uns and the women, and they'll squeal of their own accord; and if the row we make between us don't scare 'em, we must dash down and defend the women. I wish I'd a sword or a pistol!"

"*I'll* look after the women," said Miss Lamblion, in a quiet voice. She had come up unheard and unseen, very queerly dressed, and carrying a big blunderbuss. "Mind you do exactly what you've said, Lawrence," she added. "I'm going down to the back-door. If they manage to break in, I fancy there won't be many left to run away and boast of it. I've loaded my weapon pretty nearly up to the muzzle."

Fortunately Miss Lamblion was not called upon to commit justifiable homicide or not so justifiable suicide. The smashing of the water-jugs and the yell of their smashers, supplemented by the cries of the suddenly awakened small boys, so terrified the robbers that they took to flight. The town guards, regular and volunteer, chancing to be not far off, came up at the double when they heard

the noise, surrounded the scamps, and took the whole body of them prisoners.

Although it is looking ahead a little, I may as well finish off this chapter by recording their fate.

A gipsy, who was one of the party, turned Queen's—or stay, it was King's evidence in those days, and so escaped punishment for the burglaries; but Bob Haste, who was also of the party, through spite at having been anticipated in thus saving himself, brought the gipsy and his tribe to justice for the arson at Foxearth; amongst them were the two women who had stripped Percy and Dick, and as the whole lot of them, gipsies and burglars both, were sent across the sea, the scamps and scampesses of our little story have been satisfactorily accounted for, with the exception of M. d'Enflure, and no doubt he broke his neck, or the nose of which he was so vain, or came to beggary, and, to his horror, was forced to work, or something of that sort.

XXIV.

THE time for the Professor's Fourth Quarterly Assembly had arrived—the Saturday before Miss Lamblion's examination was to begin. This last was always the merriest assembly of the year, because of Christmas being so near; and the Professor, having become a very popular public character in Brackenbury, had on this occasion issued more invitations and provided more festive refreshments than usual. More grown-up people than usual stood up to dance with the children and with one another. Pretty Miss Carter scarcely had a rest throughout the little early ball, numbering as one of her partners the august Professor. Dick was another, and so was M. Appliqué, but Mr. Reynolds was not: she was obliged to refuse him, owing to the overwhelming number of her previous engagements; but the jealous drawing master chose to believe that she could have danced with him if she had chosen. She had danced with that fellow Appliqué! She meant to insult him, and give that fat little beast a chance of triumphing over him. Mr. Reynolds scowled at M. Appliqué, but the fat little French master lost no flesh under the drawing master's frowns, however withering. They had no effect upon him whatsoever, except to make him more than ever like an amiable monkey, bent on making

everyone as merry as himself. He shrugged his fat little shoulders, he rubbed his plump little hands, he creased his fleshy little face

"Pretty Miss Carter scarcely had a rest throughout the little early ball."

into the most comical grimaces as he pretended to sympathize with his colleague's sufferings, which he chose to attribute to *mal*

d'estomac, and advised him to try the curative agency of his compatriot's *ponsch*. It could not have been the effect of that, even on this occasion, not too potent beverage, but somehow Mr. Reynolds got savager and savager as the afternoon wore on. At first he had tried to chill his tormentor by meeting his would-be facetious advances with scornful silence, but at length he was stung into saying with a sneer, "You are safe before the ladies, sir."

"Safe!" cried the little Frenchman. "*Pourquoi non?* Yes, yes, I am safe, ever safe before de ladee. Dey vill not hurt me—no, no; not at all. Dey 'ave for me *beaucoup de bonté*. Zoo 'ave reason, M. Rainold. I am de great *favori* vid de ladee."

"Conceited little mountebank!" growled the drawing master, and having favoured his rival with another scowl, he turned upon his heel and stalked away like a hero in a melodrama.

When he looked back, M. Appliqué was talking to Miss Carter during one of her few brief rests, and she was laughing heartily. It was because she had thought at first that the French master was asking her a riddle when he had said, "For vat is M. Rainold like de bear vid de sore head?" But since they were both looking in his direction and laughing, Mr. Reynolds was convinced that they were both laughing at him, and began to feel that he must pitch into the little Frenchy before he slept, or he would not be able to enjoy the Sabbath's rest.

It chanced that the two rivals met after the assembly, on their way to their respective homes. The Frenchman resumed his teasing chatter, and the Englishman, losing all patience, brushed him aside with his arm. All trace of fun instantly vanished from M. Appliqué's face. First it flashed fury, and then, freezing up into a comically stern dignity, the little man demanded satisfaction for a blow, adding that he should send a friend to wait upon M. Rainold, but that he might as well state his immutable terms at once: either an abject apology, or a hostile meeting.

Mr. Reynolds was in a fix. It would have pleased him rather than otherwise to pitch into the Frenchman with the weapons which nature had given him. His feelings would have been relieved, for—oh, shame! unchivalrous drawing master!—he knew that he was the stronger of the two, and that the French master knew even less about *le boxe* (although very fond of talking about it) than he did. But to have to fight with sword or pistols

was quite another affair. Mr. Reynolds began to wish that he had contented himself with verbal hits at the Frenchman's conceit. They could have been made tremendously hard in the appreciation of everybody but himself, and so he might have been grossly insulted with the greatest impunity. In those days duels were still sometimes fought by members of the English Army and Navy, Parliament, and Upper Ten, and if any one not belonging to those classes chose, in order that he might "cut a bounce," as the phrase went then, to give an opponent a challenge, it could not be declined, as it could now, simply on the ground that it was so very ridiculous. Although even then English people were inclined to think duellists of the non-privileged classes great fools, they were also inclined to think a member of those classes that refused to fight a duel when challenged—especially by a Frenchman, who could not be expected to know how to use his fists in scientific style—a bit of a coward.

The Professor, who was the friend that M. Appliqué had selected, called upon Mr. Reynolds and repeated his principal's terms. If simply an apology had been demanded, Mr. Reynolds would have been inclined to give it, but the "abject" stuck in his throat, especially since Miss Carter was sure to hear all about the business.

Accordingly, Mr. Reynolds declined to apologise.

"*Très-bien*," answered the Professor. "Zoo know de alternatif, —zoo must fight to-night, if zoo please."

But Mr. Reynolds could not think of disturbing the repose of his widowed mother's declining days by going out to fight a duel in the dark on Saturday night.

"*Demain?*"

Mr. Reynolds could not think of breaking the Sabbath.

"On Monday, den, M. Rainold," said the Professor. "M. Appliqué vill not vait more long time to vash out de stain zoo 'ave put on 'im. De sword or the *pistolet?*"

Mr. Reynolds said it was indifferent to him.

"*Oui, oui*," answered the Professor. "Zoo know no more of de von dan zoo know of de oder. *En ami, donc, moi:* I say—apologise. My compatriot vill cut your troat before you may be able to vink, and he can keel de flea industrious on de top of de steeple vid his ball of pistol."

But with the respite of Sunday to stave off the duel, Mr. Reynolds could not yet bring himself to apologise.

"Ver good, sare," said the Professor; "but I vill yet stan' zoo frien.' Zoo vill vant von for de duel. Shall I carry 'im? *Moi*, I know more of dese ting dan zoo, my dear. Zoo can trust me? We 'ave known each oder long time."

The drawing master assured the dancing master that he should be most grateful for the performance of the proffered service, and the Professor took his departure. He had no particular liking for Mr. Reynolds, and would have enjoyed extracting an abject apology from him, but for Miss Lamblion's sake M. Gautier was not going to allow a "scene" to take place between two of her masters; and so, having obtained the drawing master's permission to select a "friend" for him, the sly old Professor chose Miss Lamblion, and at once trotted off to her house and told her all that had happened. She as promptly cloaked herself, and set out on her very angry mission of peace. She went to both her masters in turn, scolded them as if they had been little children, and made the one promise that he would not fight, and the other that he would apologise, by threats that otherwise she would take away her own patronage from the master addressed, and induce all his other employers to do the same.

Wisely, she did not inform Mr. Reynolds, when she demanded his apology, that M. Appliqué had already promised not to fight, or he might not have given it quite so readily as he did at her dictation.

On Monday Miss Lamblion's examination began. This was looked upon as rather a solemn affair, since Dr. Birch, the headmaster of the Grammar School, whose grammars and delectuses were used in Miss Lamblion's establishment, to humour his old friend wrote her classical papers for her. Perhaps he made them a good deal easier than she would have done, but then to be asked, "How many declensions of substantives are there in Latin? and what are the endings of their genitive cases singular?" in the handwriting of a great scholar, famous at the Universities, to which he had sent up young men—real "big fellows"—who had become famous scholars themselves, somewhat awed Miss Lamblion's young gentlemen. The discovery that they were able to tackle these profound papers pretty satisfactorily without bringing

on brain fever was not altogether reassuring to the boys. What a deal more, they thought, they must have to learn before they became famous scholars, like Dr. Birch and his pupils. The fact that there were no "regular lessons" during the week was one of the great charms of examination; and then Miss Lamblion insisted on two of the day-boys, who were going to take part in the recitations, becoming boarders during that week, in order that they might receive their final polishing up in elocution in the evenings—so that was another change. In spite, too, of the writing during the day, and declamations after tea, more play than usual was somehow or other got during examination week than at other times; and then there were the Christmas holidays to look forward to. They would begin next week, but it seemed as if they would never end.

The examination was over, its results had been summed up, and Dick was very proud to find that he would be one of those who would have to walk up to the table on which the prizes would be laid out on breaking-up day. He could not exactly say whether he was glad or sorry that, although Percy would have to go up too, *his* prize was only one of the "make-believes" which good-natured Miss Lamblion gave to pupils, who had failed to distinguish themselves in public competition, for private virtues, of which the proprietors were frequently unaware until she discovered them. On the last Sunday of the half the boys were excused even their light Sunday lessons; and then came the eventful Monday, and the barber and his men, who for a time filled the house with a healthy scent of hot iron and singed hair, as they frizzled, at Miss Lamblion's expense, her pupils' locks for their appearance in public. A goodly company of the boys' kinsfolk and of their governesses' acquaintances and friends assembled in the schoolroom, glorified for the occasion. Amongst them were Dick's mamma and sisters, and Miss Knight, at whose house they were to sleep that night.

Wasn't *that* party proud when Dick, with his head thrown back, marched up to the table for his prizes? for he took more than one, and not a "make-believe" among them (though this, as motherly Lily pointed out to him afterwards, to moderate his conceit, was only proof that he possessed no retiring private virtues). Didn't Susie think the boys such *very* nice young gentlemen, because

when Dick's name was called, and during his somewhat stately progress to the prize-giver, they clapped their hands as if they were as pleased as she was? And didn't Mrs. Abbott think Miss Carter an interesting young creature, because she had been good enough to go too near the tiger and thus afford the heroic Richard an opportunity of displaying his unexampled gallantry? On the strength of having nearly got killed, Miss Carter got an invitation to Foxearth.

Annie had not a very high opinion of the first piece of poetry which Dick recited (whatever she might think of the reciter)—"On a Bird's Nest."

> "No tool had he that wrought; no knife to cut,
> No nail to fix; no bodkin to insert,
> No glue to join——"

"What nonsense!" said Annie to herself. "Whoever thought that the birds had bodkins and glue-pots?" But she quite agreed with the rest of her party in considering Dick's rendering of "Alexander and the Robber" the day's masterpiece of elegantly eloquent delivery—just as one or other of every other boy's pieces was so considered by *his* friends. The merry breaking-up party followed, and then next morning, while the principal and Mrs. Dow were staggering in a troubled sea of packing up and preparing to see off, the two other teachers helping them or getting ready to start themselves, the women-servants neglecting work which they ought to have done in order only to pretend to do things which there was no need for them to do, and Peter stopping in the midst of his work, and sitting down on the box which he had been cording, to think of the vastly diminished number of boots and shoes he would have to black upon the morrow,—a fly, with Dick's mamma and sisters inside, pulled up at Miss Lamblion's for Master Abbot and his boxes.

As he rode off on the box seat, "A merry Christmas, Dick!" went after him from Miss Lamblion's. "A merry Christmas, Master Dick!" from Mrs. Buskitt, met upon the road, sped him on his way out of Brackenbury. "A merry Christmas, Dick, my boy!" was his father's greeting to him at Foxearth.

And now, having brought him home again, I have nothing more to say, except—

A Merry Christmas, all of you!

LITTLE GRIG.

I.—THE VIEW FROM THE WINDOW.

THE window was high up in the wall—so high that Little Grig had climbed there by means of the one rickety chair the room afforded, and now was perched on, or rather clinging to, the narrow ledge, and flattening his nose against the dusty glass.

The window looked on to a mews. There was not much to be seen below; a group of men were smoking their pipes. They had something to drink, too, in a black bottle which passed amongst them; and the oftener it went round the louder and the more angry grew the notes that reached Grig's ears, as he listened, as well as looked, from his post of observation. Now and then a cab—always one of the worst specimens of London cabs, dirty, rattling, with, may be, a broken window or ill-fitting door, and with musty, faded, torn cushions, worse, some people thought, than no cushions at all—turned into the untidy yard. At such times the face of the little watcher brightened, and he looked on with eager interest during the process of unharnessing the jaded miserable horse, and the lazy washing of the dirty cab with water which, being in no state to clean anything, seemed to leave it dirtier than before. The next thing to watch for was, whether the driver would join the group of idlers already mentioned, or whether one from amongst them would join *him*, and the two stroll away into the streets beyond. Satisfied on this point, there was no other amusement left but to keep a look-out for the next cab.

By-and-by there came running round the corner two ragged children, who fell upon a heap of dust and refuse of all sorts, which had been swept up together in an angle of the wall, as though it had been a heap of treasure. Grig knew that they were looking for orange-peel or bits of apple, and his excitement in the chances of their luck grew quite intense. He flattened his

nose more than ever against the glass. Nor was his interest at all lessened when the children were followed by a woman with torn cap and dingy gown, who seized hold of one of them, and began to deal out blows impartially between the two, the sound of their loud crying being added to the other sounds which rose up to the dusty window. Grig noticed that one of the men said something which seemed to enrage the virago, for she let loose her hold of the culprits, and, with arms akimbo, turned to confront the smokers, her loud scolding voice mingling with the rude laughter of the men. As for the children, once released, they had plunged again into the dust-heap, proving thereby that their cries had been louder than could be justified by any injuries they had received. But then, in their experience, it was always wiser to cry out *before* they were hurt—they had never found it of much good to do so afterwards. Out of breath at last with her attack upon the men, the woman turned once more to the children; but they expected her this time, and fled as she approached. The last Grig saw of her was as she turned the corner in pursuit, still scolding and shaking her clenched fist. Slowly, one by one, the men got up and went away, so that for a time there was silence in the mews.

Only comparative silence, however, for the ceaseless murmur from the thronged streets, the ceaseless rush and roar of passing traffic, penetrated there. A louder rush and roar, too, made itself heard occasionally—a noise as of thunder somewhere up amongst the chimney-pots—a thunder that crashed along the roofs, and shook the houses to their foundations. It was the passing train; and every time he heard it, little Grig glanced uneasily over his shoulder into the room behind him. There was very little to be seen there either—absolutely nothing but the chair with three legs, by which the child had mounted to his present position, a deal table, and a mattress on the floor in one corner. On the mattress lay what might well have been taken for a bundle of old rags, but that, in some uneasy tossing of the sleeper, a hand and arm, so thin as to be merely skin and bone, had been thrust out from amongst the torn garments. It was in this direction that Grig glanced anxiously; but the hand lay still and motionless, and gave no sign that its owner had been disturbed by the crashing thunder overhead, so he turned his attention once more to the view below.

At last his patience was rewarded: a cab, shabby enough, to be sure, but neater, cleaner, better kept than the others, with a horse not quite so jaded-looking or worn-out, but one that seemed altogether better fed and better cared for, turned into the now empty space beneath the window. There was something spruce and tidy, too, about the driver. His hat, though almost napless, was well brushed; his coat, where it had been torn, was actually mended—roughly patched and darned; the patch upon his arm was bright, and, moreover, he wore a flower in his buttonhole. Grig gave a sigh of satisfaction, and shuffled about ecstatically on his uneasy perch.

"Here's Joe at last," he murmured audibly, "and my! if he ain't got a posy!"

It was a sight to see *that* horse unharnessed, and then tied to the hook outside the stable door while he was rubbed down; to see him patted and caressed meanwhile; and to know when he disappeared at last into his stall that, however it might fare with other horses, there was an honest feed of oats for him. And then to see the cab really washed; the water dashed over it, the wheels turning round so merrily as the wet mop flew about them, scattering bright drops as it went; and to see Joe Garnell looking up every now and then to the dusty panes so far above his head, and exchanging a nod with little Grig, whose face was by this time almost glued to the glass, and who sighed, poor boy, because it *was* so dusty, owing to which he could not see so well as might be wished.

When his business was completed, Joe stepped into the middle of the yard, whistled loudly, once, twice, three times; then looking up at Grig, he nodded again; and Grig nodded back with so much energy that it almost seemed as if he would nod his head off altogether. He knew what would happen next; he saw it happen every evening. At the first whistle, two bright little faces had looked out from an open window three doors off, and a child's voice had cried joyfully: "Coming, father! coming!" before the last had died away, two little girls were clinging each to one of Garnell's big hard hands, and two pairs of little feet were jumping up and down beside him.

"Now they're a-going for a walk," said the solitary boy, still speaking to himself, not enviously at all, only fully sympathising

with the delight he could not share. "Shouldn't wonder if Joe was to buy 'em a pie this evening; and I shouldn't wonder neither if he was to bring one home for me."

"Coming, father! coming!"

More telegraphing now took place between little Grig and his friend. Garnell beckoned to the child, pointing forward in the

direction of the street, then, with his head very much on one side, threw an inquiring expression into his eyes, and twisted his whole body, as it were, into a note of interrogation, all which meant, would Grig go with him?

But Grig only shook his head in return, and was obliged to shake it very decidedly too, so dim was the window, and so hard it was for Joe to read his signals through it. Perhaps this energetic head-shaking, following so soon upon the energetic nodding, made him too giddy to keep his seat with comfort upon the narrow ledge; perhaps, Joe being gone, he had no further inducement to remain up there at all; whichever way it was, Grig determined to get down as quietly as he got up, and find what amusement he could in the bare unfurnished room—the only home he knew. But the best of intentions are liable to result in failure. Grig got down anything *but* quietly, for, owing to the unwary placing of his foot upon the legless corner of the chair, boy, chair and all came with a great crash to the ground.

"Oh my!" said Grig, lying for a moment upon his back to collect his scattered senses by staring up at the ceiling; then raising himself upon one elbow at the sound of an uneasy movement from the mattress, he asked: "Was it I as woke you, mother?" Rather an unnecessary question, since had it been night, and all the lodgers sound asleep, Grig had certainly made noise enough to rouse the soundest sleeper amongst them.

II.—GRIG'S MOTHER.

"YES, Grig, I'm awake," said his mother; hearing which her little son crossed over to where the mattress lay, and crouched down beside it, sitting with his hands clasped round her two knees, on which rested his chin, a favourite attitude of Grig's when disposed for conversation.

Of course you will have understood that this boy had some other name than that by which we have hitherto known him; but he did not know himself, and it is to be doubted if anyone did but his mother, that he had been christened Gregory, after his dead father. Everyone called him Grig, even the teacher at the ragged-school, and the district visitor who now and then found her way up the narrow crazy stair to Mary Field's room.

"Is it fine out doors?" asked the sick woman.

"My! ain't it just!" answered the boy. "The chimbly-pots is that red with the light as you'd think every one on 'em was on fire."

You see, the reflected light of the sun shining on the dreary waste of roofs and house-tops, visible from the window, was the

"He sat with his hands clasped round his two knees."

best way Grig had of judging what sort of an evening it was. True, there was one little strip of sky across which, just then, there sailed two or three golden clouds, changing gradually to flame-colour, and growing rosy-red before they passed out of sight.

Turning his head about to follow with his eyes those sailing clouds, Grig ceased to watch his mother; and when he looked at her again, her eyes were closed. But she was not sleeping, he saw that—knew it by the contraction of her brow, and the restless movement of the long thin fingers. He leaned forward and gently touched her arm, to recall her attention to himself.

"I know what I'll be, mother; I've quite settled now."

"What you'll be, Grig, as how?"

"When I'm growed a man, I mean. I've seen Joe do it lots of times. I'm sure as I could clean a horse myself, and wash a cab. That's it, mother; it's a cab horse as I mean to be."

Grig was so earnest and so eager that he mistook his words, and placed them wrong—"A driver I *should* say, a driver, like Joe Garnell. A man fur to drive a horse along the streets, like Joe; to unharness him at night, like Joe; to pat, and feed, and rub him down, and wash his wheels with a wet mop, and dash the water all about him, same as Joe!" concluded Grig, mixing up, in his excitement, cab and horse in glorious confusion together.

"You're a far way off it yet; there's a deal of time to come and go before you're growed to be a man. Did they say when they was to start, Grig?" she added, anxiously.

"They was talking of it last night, and again this morning 'fore they all went out. To-morrow, Granny said, as like as not; but you'll never be able to go to-morrow, mother."

The woman shook her head. Never to-morrow, Grig, or any other day—never any more at all; but how *could* she tell him that?

"You'll go, my lad," was all she said.

"Not without you, mother."

"Yes, yes; you be a good lad, and mind my words. You go along of Granny, and Susan Kaims, and Jim. You'll tell me all about it by-and-by. Yes, I do think you will, Grig; I do believe as I shall hear all about it, and how they treat you. I shall hear it for true and certain." She paused, exhausted.

"Of course you'll hear. I'll tell you soon as ever I get back. But you'll want me, mother. Who is there to do for you when I'm away?"

"No, Grig, don't you bother over that. I shan't want for nothing."

Want for nothing! That sounded very strange, when Grig could hardly remember the time that he and his mother had not wanted for nearly *everything!* And how could she tell him it was true; that the day was so surely drawing near, was so very close at hand now, when she would never want for anything again? How could she bring herself to tell him, and she all he had in the wide world? Poor little Grig!

He meditated awhile over that last answer, shaking his head gravely, then hazarded a guess as to its meaning.

"Is it Frump as will look in and do for you? She's a good 'un, *I* know. I mind how she used to see to me when I had the fever, and you was out charing all day. Is it Frump, mother?"

The woman closed her eyes wearily.

"Oh, I don't know. Yes, may be Frump 'll do for me. Grig, is there a bit of tea left anywheres?"

Yes, there was "a bit of tea," a tiny pinch in an old screw of paper, and on the table was a cracked teapot and a china mug, while under it the small pail of water, representing their day's supply, which had been toilsomely fetched by Grig himself that morning from the court below, was still half-full. Grig proceeded to pour some of the water into a rusty tin kettle, and then to light a fire. He looked about to see if there was anything else to cook at the same time, for he had learned to be economical of his fuel; but there was nothing for supper; indeed, nothing eatable in the place at all, except some crusts of mouldy bread.

"We'll have to ask for 'daily bread' to-night," said Grig, cheerfully, as he sat upon the floor before the fire, coaxing it to burn, and feeding it with tiny morsels of coal, giving it only just enough to keep it alive, and being careful even of the grains of fine black dust lingering at the bottom of his sack—"and then," he went on, showing in his speech a just appreciation of the proverb, "Heaven helps those who help themselves"—"then I'll go out for an hour or so, and earn a penny, if I can, to buy it with; but, oh my! if I'm to go hopping to-morrow, how can I get you any bread?"

"Yes, yes; you're to go," said his mother, impatiently. "Think how many times I've told you of it, Grig. Think how the sun shines there, and how sweet the air is; and think what a lot you'll earn pulling hops."

"There's posies, isn't there, down in the country?" said Grig, smiling, as the firelight flickered on his pale little face.

"Posies? yes, indeed! beauty ones—red, blue, and white, Grig, all colours; and you may pull 'em where you will. And there's fruit, too, lad. Berries, blackberries, such as you see a-selling in the streets sometimes, only they don't sell 'em in the country; you may just pick them, too, same as the posies."

"Not *berries!*" said the child, turning delighted wondering eyes

towards her—"not berries; you don't say so, mother! And for me to pick 'em where I will. There's grass, too, isn't there?"

"Green and growing, lad; *so* green and fresh, too, in the early mornings, all wet then with dew. And water, Grig—such clear clean water—and no stint of it; brooks running over pebbles, whole rivers by the road!"

"That's awkward, though, ain't it?" asked Grig, gravely, directing his attention once more to the fire, and bestowing upon it one morsel of black coal. "Where's the folk to walk, and where's the cabs and carriages to go, if there's rivers running in the streets, and all that grass about?"

"There ain't no streets at all. There's roads, and fields, and meadows, and tall trees; and there's houses with little gardens to 'em by the roadside, and little white gates, and hedges where the sweetbrier smells so strong at evening."

"You see it all when you was a girl, mother, didn't you? You lived there once?"

"Yes, lad; I lived there once. 'Twas down in the country as I met father; it was hopping time, too, Grig. O my heart! my heart!" and the poor thing fell to crying and sobbing pitifully, until the thin worn frame was shaken under the heap of rags, and seemed as if it must be torn to pieces altogether by the violence of her grief.

Grig went up to her, and stood there with a troubled face, stooping from time to time to pat her softly on the shoulder, and saying "Don't, mammy; don't, now," over and over again, until he was obliged to leave her to lift the kettle—by this time spluttering and boiling over—from off the fire; but that done, coming back again to pat her as before, and repeat his "Don't, oh don't, mammy!"

Perhaps the soft touch of the childish hand and the trouble in the childish voice, quieted her as soon as anything else would have done; for by degrees her sobs ceased, and she lay back still, and almost breathless. Grig brought her the tea—such tea as it was, pale straw-colour, and boasting neither milk nor sugar; but she drank it eagerly, and said it did her good; and after that there was silence for a little while. Grig had taken up his post again upon the floor beside the mattress, and sat gazing intently upon his mother's face, until he could scarcely

distinguish it any longer, owing to the darkness of the room, and the difficulty the light had to struggle in at all through the dusty window-panes, for out of doors there was daylight still. It grew so dull in there, so dreamy and so quiet, that the boy started when he heard his mother's voice.

"Say them good words, Grig, as you learnt at school."

So Grig said the twenty-third Psalm, and did not say it very well either, not understanding all of it, and being apt to run the words one into another, and to pronounce them now and then after a fashion of his own. But the first line seemed to have been enough for his mother. "The Lord is my Shepherd," she repeated, softly, over and over again, and presently fell asleep with the words upon her lips. There was silence once more, and for a longer time. Grig was almost asleep himself, when it was broken at last by the sound of loud voices, by singing, laughter, and the tramp of many feet, and by the sudden bursting open of the door to admit some of the noisy party. A young woman with a baby in her arms, and a girl of about sixteen or seventeen, who was still singing boisterously, were followed by an exceedingly sour-looking old woman.

III.—GRANNY.

"SUSAN KAIMS, you please to get out!" exclaimed the old woman. "I've got to speak to Mary."

"Get out yourself, Granny," answered Susan, good-humouredly. "*I've* got to speak to Mary, too. Not but what my business 'll keep. I can wait till you're done, old lady." So speaking, she looked at the broken chair, shook her head at it, as having no faith at all in its powers of support, and accepting the only alternative that offered itself, sank down, with her baby in her arms, upon the floor, near the mattress. There was light enough in the room now, for the door had been left open, and the flame from a gas-burner on the landing streamed in and fully illuminated the poverty-stricken apartment.

Now be it understood that "Granny" was not the grandmother of anyone in particular, or indeed of anyone at all in that crazy dingy house, so full of lodgers, amongst whom, or amongst the poorest of whom, she had contrived to obtain an influence of some sort, and to make herself obeyed after a rough fashion. They all

called her "Granny," and she seemed to have no other name; but that was because, until last year, the word had echoed up the

"Granny."

dark staircase, and been heard in childish accents along the passages, and the sound had been accompanied by the patter of little feet. When the old woman had first come to these lodgings,

and first taken possession of the one dilapidated room she had rented ever since, the fair-hairded blue-eyed little Molly had come with her. Grig and she had been great friends. It was in Mary Field's room that the little girl had learned to lisp "Our Father," and so to link earth and heaven together in her childish heart. It was with Grig that she had found her way to the ragged-school; with Grig that she had played down in the mews, or ventured into the crowded streets; and it was with Grig that she had always taken refuge when Granny's voice grew loud, and her face red and angry. Every year the old woman went into the hop counties, on such an expedition as that which was in prospect for the morrow; and she was so clever at all necessary arrangements, so sharp at a bargain with the farmers, knew so well how to deal with them, how also to keep in check the rough spirits in the "camp," to look after the money, and make sure that great part of it at least found its way home to Gutter Alley, and was not squandered at public-houses on the way, that those amongst her fellow-lodgers who went hopping too were glad to do so in her company, and to let her take the lead. In short, Granny, although only a poor old woman in a crowded London lodging-house, loved power, and knew how to use it.

When the time came round for the yearly migration into the country, Molly had always been left behind in Mary Field's care, and those had been happy days for the two children. Scant food, poor clothing, and such work as children could accomplish, yet with it all such merry play, no fear of hard words or blows, no check upon their childish mirth. But last year, Molly being at that time a year older than little Grig, her grandmother had decided to take her with her, and make her useful at the "bin"—and little fair-haired blue-eyed Molly never had come back again! The child had caught a chill in that unaccustomed life in the fresh air, and they had left her amongst the hop garlands and the great trees, amongst the hedge-rows and meadows of the pleasant country; so that, thinking of her, Grig felt puzzled in his mind; and when his mother told him, weeping, that Molly had gone to heaven, the boy mixed up in his thoughts the heavenly land and the beautiful country he had never seen, and felt somehow as if heaven were on earth, down in the hop counties, and that if he ever went there, he should surely find his little friend again

playing by the running water, and gathering the "beauty posies" that his mother told him of.

No one knew whether Granny had felt her loss; not even Susan Kaims, in whose arms the child had died, and who had cried sadly herself when the little body was laid in its grave in the country churchyard. The old woman said no word, and gave no sign of sorrow; but it was whispered that Moll must have been found useful, even at her tender age, for it could only be with an eye to business that Granny had proposed to take little Grig to the hop-picking. Equally with an eye to business, Molly's vacant place in her grandmother's room had long ago been filled by an orphan girl, whose poverty and friendless state, together with her reckless waste and mismanagement of her scanty earnings, rendered her glad enough to be "done for" by the old woman, who, in her turn, knew well how to make the bargain a profitable one for herself. She turned fiercely now upon this *protégée* of hers.

"I'll see *you* out of here anyhow, Bess. Yelling like that, too; fit to split one's head," for the girl was still singing loudly as she stood leaning against the door-post. "Come, upstairs with you!"

"Oh, I'm off, so as Grig 'll come too," answered Bess, catching hold of the little boy as she spoke. "See here, lad; what a lark we'll have in the hop-garden, won't we?"

Grig shook himself free, and Granny, with an angry shove, speeded the girl upon her way. They heard her singing still, as she climbed the narrow stair leading to the attic in the roof.

"And now, Mary," said the old woman, drawing near to the wretched bed, and speaking in a lower voice, "is the lad to go, or ain't he?"

"Yes, sure; he's to go. He'll earn enough to make it well worth while: and, Granny, you'll see as he gets what he earns, won't you?"

"He'll earn no more than his keep," said Granny, quickly, "no more than that, I'll be bound; and if I'm to look to him, same as I do to Bess, and see as he gets his victuals, why it's I as should take his money. And I'm thinking I'll be out of pocket by the doing of it. Yes, now I come to look at him close," and she did look at him close, and very sharply too, with her keen covetous eyes, "I don't think as he *will* earn his keep."

"He'll do that," said his mother, earnestly; "he's handy, Grig is, and willing, too."

"Then I'm to see to him and manage for him, same as for Bess?"

Too exhausted to speak, or not able to bring herself to say the word, the sick woman nodded silently.

"Be ready, then, at dawn, you boy," the old woman continued; "be ready by five o'clock, and not a minute later." So saying, she turned her back on them, and passed through the open door, darkening the room for an instant as her form intercepted the flood of gas-light, and went on her way upstairs.

"With one thin wasted hand she gently touched Susan's sleeping babe."

When she was gone, the invalid raised herself on one arm, and stared up into Susan's face with sad, wistful eyes. With one thin wasted hand she gently touched Susan's sleeping babe, then looked at Grig.

"Fatherless," she said, faintly. "Oh, Susan! fatherless."

"I know, I know," cried her companion; "we'll do the best we can—Mary, Jim and me. Granny won't ill-use him, she's too 'cute for that; and we'll see as he gets meat and drink reg'lar, as it's certain Grig 'll earn 'em fair; but for the money—why, he'll not see much of that, so long as Granny does for him."

"No matter for the money; but when he comes back here—afterwards; oh Susan! afterwards?"

"Yes, I know," Susan said again, "and you mustn't fret about it. We'll still do the best we can. We're not good for much, Jim and me, but I think we're good for this much—I promise you as Grig shall get a mouthful to live on, and some trifle of honest work to do. He'll be worth a deal of money to Granny one way and another, and she's sharp enough to know it. She'll feed him, never fear, and Jim and me will do our best. I might go to that school as Grig speaks so much about, and have a talk with the teacher, and get him for to see that the boy have his bit of learning. I might, and I *will*, too," concluded Susan.

The mother fell back upon her mattress satisfied. Once more she softly touched, not Susan herself, but Susan's sleeping child. "God bless you," she murmured, faintly.

Meantime Susan Kaims began to feel in her pocket, and Grig to watch her with eager eyes. She produced a bundle, made out of a pocket handkerchief, tied and knotted up together. From the bundle there came forth at last a pie, and a small roll of fresh white bread.

"Oh my!" said little Grig; "and is it mutton, Sue—or is it veal and pork?"

"*I* don't know," said Susan, laughing as she tossed it to him, "'taint mine; how should it be? Where do you suppose it came from, lad?"

"Not Joe?"

"Ay sure, from Joe, and no one else. 'You take and give this to little Grig,' says he; and here's he been and sent a little loaf to mother, too. Come, Mary, how is it we never thought of Joe Garnell? That's another friend for the lad, anyway."

The sick woman, tempted by the unwonted delicacy, was trying to eat a morsel or two of the white bread, and Grig was exploring into the recesses of his treasure, which proved to be a mutton pie, and a very satisfactory one, when a man's step passed the door,

and Susan Kaims, exclaiming, "There's Jim!" started to her feet. Mary Field detained her for a moment, holding by her dress.

"Stoop down and kiss me, Susan; stoop down and kiss me for good-bye."

A kiss, *any* token of tenderness or affection—where, however, there was often so true a tenderness at heart—was a rare thing in that house, and the young woman seemed surprised; but she knelt down and gave the kiss, and whispered to the mother not to lose heart about her boy, for Jim and she would do their best, and then she went away and left them to themselves.

IV.—THE FIRST AND LAST PARTING.

THE first rays of the rising sun were gilding the housetops next morning, when little Grig was roused from his sound sleep by his mother's kisses on his face. He rubbed his eyes, sat up, and grumbled at being woke so early, until he remembered what an eventful day this was to be, remembered all about the hop-picking, and the beautiful country which he was to see for the first time in his life. Shaking himself free from the rags and tatters which formed the only covering of the bed, he hurried on his clothes, and, by his mother's advice, stuffed his little pocket with such of the mouldy crusts as still remained after he had made a hasty meal. There were sounds of movement in the house already, and before long the girl Bess put her head in at the door, and told him they were nearly ready now to start. Grig clung to his mother then, and felt almost sorry to go.

"Are you sure as Frump 'll see to you, mammy? Are you sure you'll want for nothing?"

"I'll not want for anything, Grig, be sure of that. Remember it by-and-by; remember I told you I *knew* as I should want for nothing, and as I should be very well and happy. It'll be a comfort to you some day to remember that."

"Here's plenty of the white loaf still, mother," said the boy, placing it beside her; "the 'daily bread' came this time without me earning of it. Did you pray for it, yesterday?"

His mother pulled the little face down towards her, and held it close, and pressed her hot dry lips to it, and whispered to him

never to forget her, and bid him say his prayers, and ask his Father in heaven for all he ever needed.

"You'll be better when I come back, mammy, and I'll tell you all about the country, and them roads and rivers that you talk of. May be I'll bring you home a posy, or some berries, certainly, a big bunch of hops, mother."

When Granny looked in at the door, and roughly bade him be quick and follow her downstairs, he was still clinging to his mother's neck, talking of the time when they would meet again, talking of how it would fare with her while he was away.

"Now run, Grig, run. Don't anger Granny, whatever you do."

But when he reached the door, she called him back for one last kiss, and could not bring herself to tell him that it *was* the last, but held him tight, and prayed God bless him, and then, looking back and kissing his hand to her as he went, little Grig passed from her sight, and she was left alone to learn that lesson, oh! so much harder to learn for our dear ones than for ourselves—the lesson of trust in God.

It was nigh noon, and the sun shone straight down into the mews, shone bright and fierce even through the little dusty window, before anyone came near Mary Field's room. Then Frump, the woman who let the lodgings, and lived herself in some poor corner of them, either in the cellars or up under the roof, according as her many tenants left her anywhere an unoccupied space, came toiling up the stairs, and entered with a little basin in her hand. She did not say much. Mrs. Badger——to give "Frump" her proper style and title—was a woman of few words; but under her rough exterior there was a kind heart, and if she *said* few gentle things, she *did* many kind ones. No one supposed that Frump had an easy life of it, or was indeed any the better for her many lodgers; they all knew that a Mr. Badger, somewhere in the background, whom none of them had ever seen, absorbed the profits, and that Frump was only his poor slave, and, in the matter of collecting the various rents, only his representative.

The sick woman was unable to swallow the broth which the little basin contained; just a spoonful or two she took, and then it was placed on the ground beside her; and, feeling beneath her

head, she drew out the rent, so carefully and honestly saved amid all her poverty, and wrapped up in a twist of paper.

"There'll be no more," she said, "but there'll be none due again before I'm gone."

Mrs. Badger thought it likely that she spoke the truth, and a few words passed between them, as a matter of course, and quite in a business-like manner, respecting the funeral and the application that must be made to the parish officer by-and-by.

"And I'll see as Grig has your duds," said Frump. "Law! there ain't no duds!" she added, looking round; and indeed there were not.

Grig's mother put into her hand a tattered prayer-book.

"I'd like for him to have that," she said; "he can't read yet, but may be he will some day; and his father's name is wrote in it. There ain't nothing else for him."

Frump came in two or three times that day, and towards night the doctor came too. He had seen the dying woman several times before, but had not in the first instance been called in until too late to stay the progress of her disease, and could do no good now. She lay in a stupor most of the time, and at night Frump slept in her room.

"It's dull work dying alone," Mrs. Badger said to herself, "and I doubt she'll be fetched before morning."

Grig meantime was compressed into the smallest space of a third-class carriage which it was possible for even his small person to occupy, his view limited to the faded colours of Granny's shawl on one side and the back of Bess's bonnet on the other, while sundry bundles on Jim's knee, and Susan Kaims's baby on hers, blocked up the front. But for a certain freshness in the air, but for the movement of the train, and the unaccustomed *sounds*—for *sights* he saw none but most familiar ones—Grig might almost as well have been in Gutter Alley; and it was not till they reached their destination, and he was hustled out of the train by Granny, and tumbled anyhow upon the platform, that the glories of the country burst upon him. Even then, so stiff was he from keeping one position, and from being moreover so squeezed and pressed in it, that he felt as if his feet did not belong to him, and stumbled on after the rest of the party as they

walked up a long winding hill, as if he were in a dream, and could not wake from it.

The train had brought down other hop-pickers besides their own party, as it had done for a day or two before, and would continue doing for a day or two to come. The country people looked with no favourable eyes upon these bands of "foreigners," as they call them, seeming to consider the ragged regiment as an army of foes whose object was to rob them of their labour, and lower the rate of wages; and all the time the poles were garlanded and wreathed with hops, so luxuriant and so plentiful that the hands of the whole country population would never have sufficed to gather them, and to save the bountiful crop before it spoiled. They need not have grudged the "foreigners" their share in the picking. Above all, they need not have grudged them the four or five weeks of open-air life which lay before them, and which would send those little pale-faced children back to the courts and crowded alleys where they lived, with brown ruddy faces, with a hue of health upon their cheeks, and a better chance of winning through the winter when it came. There were *some* mothers in the village who thought of all this, and glanced kindly at the interlopers as they straggled by.

"Poor things! they do look bad," ejaculated a woman standing at her door, and shading her eyes with her hand as she looked after a group of ragged, dirty, bare-footed little ones, who were quarrelling amongst themselves for the handful of crushed blackberries which they had torn down from the hedges—"a breath of country air will do them good, and as for what they earn, it must be sorely needed, I'm sure. But there! it'll all go in drink, more shame to 'em."

Perhaps this might be true of a great many poor creatures, but not of the camp where Granny ruled. What a general she was! How hard she kept the men, and little Grig, too, at work, until the conical huts of straw rose neat and warm under the hedge on the hillside, in a grass meadow sloping down towards the church; the meadow where she had for many a year pitched her tent, having long been hired, season after season, by the same farmer. Grig was amazed at these huts, amazed and delighted, as children always are with novelty. "Warm lying," said Granny, as well she might, considering that after she herself, Bess, and three other

girls for whom she had undertaken to "do," had been packed in, there must still a corner be found for Grig. But he slept well in it, though his last waking thoughts had been of his mother; dim wonderings of *how* she could be "well and happy," yet believing that it must be so, since "mother said it," and therefore that he need not grudge himself the unusual comforts around him, the hearty meal of bread and salt fish that Granny had dispensed, or all the delights his fancy pictured as lying before him on the morrow.

V.—AN UNMANAGEABLE UMBRELLA.

It was not all pleasure, as Grig soon found, for Granny kept him hard at work; not that he minded work, but he felt sure that had his mother been there, she would have allowed him many a run and game of play with the other urchins who swarmed about the hop-field; but, except during the hour's rest in the middle of the day, his fingers were steadily employed as long as light enough remained to distinguish hops from leaves. The boy declared his legs ached with standing still, and wanted a run to refresh them. He *did* turn over head and heels whenever Granny's eyes were off him for a moment. Meantime his eyes found plenty of amusement, for the first few days at least, in the new scene around him, and by the time the novelty wore off, and the green fields, tall trees, and other country sights began to grow a little familiar to him, a new interest had arisen.

The village people were careful to keep themselves, and more careful still to keep their children, aloof from the "foreigners;" but one party particularly attracted Grig's attention, and nobody could prevent his *looking* at them. Every morning a little girl, seeming hardly older than himself, appeared upon the scene, pushing a perambulator, whose obstinate bent wheel stuck in the furrowed land, and took hard work to stir it, and which carried indeed no trifling load for young arms to push, even upon smooth ground. A fair, fat, contented-looking baby sat enthroned in the shabby vehicle; a great wicker basket containing the day's provisions, a small wooden bench to sit upon, and a pile of old shawls, with an unwieldy green cotton umbrella sticking out from amongst them, completed the arrangements. A toddle of two years old—whether boy or girl it would have been impossible to guess from

its costume—clung to its sister's frock, rolled about under her feet, and otherwise impeded her movements. The umbrella, too, got the

"His fingers were steadily employed as long as light enough remained to distinguish hops from leaves."

little woman into difficulties every day. When it did not catch in the gate, and get twisted out of the perambulator altogether, it

was apt to work out by itself from the mass of shawls, and slope gradually downwards, until its nose, coming into contact with the earth, entered deeply into the clay, and stuck there, thus bringing matters to a standstill.

Arrived at the bin into which she picked, little Emily's first business was to provide for her children's comfort; the shawls were spread upon the ground, and the big umbrella tilted over them, so as to form a tent, sheltering baby from the hot glare of the September sun, or from a cold wind towards evening, as the case might be. The provision basket was placed out of reach, and then, keeping all the time a sharp eye upon her charges, little Emily went steadily to work. Sometimes she was joined by an aunt of hers—a bustling loud-voiced woman, who was almost as cross to her as Granny was to Grig, who kept her closely to her task, and only laughed at her unkindly when she entreated to be allowed to follow her little brother, and lead him back if he had wandered in his play farther from the bin than she thought safe or right for him—but more often she was quite alone. This child, though taking no more notice of the other "foreigners" than the rest of the country people did, glanced now and then at our hero when Granny dealt him a harder blow than usual, or spoke to him in a crosser voice than was customary even with her, and on those days when her aunt scolded her, or when she was in trouble on account of the wild wanderings of little Dick, the boy in his turn repaid her silent sympathy with a look. Dick himself stared open-eyed at Grig's somersaults; noticing which, the lad twisted himself into the strangest postures, grimaced, and danced, and shuffled queerly on his feet, even when he was picking hops the while—all with a view to attracting little Dick's attention if he saw him on the point of starting for a ramble, to the distress of his motherly elder sister. Grig was interested in the umbrella, too, couldn't keep his eyes off it as it came through the gate, and was with so much difficulty pushed to his corner of the field; he expected every day an overthrow of the perambulator owing to this part of its burden, a downfall to the baby, a tribulation to Emily. His expectations were at last verified.

"Here we are!" muttered Grig to himself one morning as the well-known straw hat appeared above the hedgerow, and the well-known squeaking of the obstinate wheel made itself heard. "Here

we are again! Steady now; round the corner easy. My! look where you're going to!" for Emily's head was turned the other way, and the handle of the old umbrella was taking aim at the gate-post. "That'll be an upset this time! Whew!" cried Grig, dancing from one leg to another in his excitement. But no; it was only a collision. The baby began to cry, Emily, on her knees beside it, comforted and coaxed, put things to rights again, and started once more. How the wheel stuck in the heavy earth, and how it scrooped and squealed, as if in remonstrance when it did condescend to turn, and how troublesome Dick was, hanging to his sister's skirts and dragging on her with all his weight! But on she came, until that green umbrella, without the slightest warning, took a vicious downward plunge, and as the child had just collected all her puny strength for one strong push, the upset took place—baby, basket, perambulator and all were together in a heap upon the ground.

Grig could not stand the sight of her distress. Regardless of Granny's wrath, he came capering to the scene of the catastrophe, popped the basket, the shawls, and the rebellious umbrella itself into the chaise, rattled it merrily along to the bin, while Emily carried the baby, and had even put out the bench and all the other things in the same order in which he saw them every day arranged, before he could persuade himself to go back to his work.

At noon that day Grig discovered that he was to have no dinner.

"Them as don't work don't eat," said Granny. "I'll teach you, my lad, to leave the bin another time."

Whether Emily heard this speech, or whether she only noticed that the boy was idling about disconsolately, and had made his meal off blackberries, I cannot say; but certain it is that little Dick came creeping up towards him, and held out a large slice of cake.

Grig turned head over heels six times running before he took it, and then nodded his thanks to Emily, before sitting down under the hedge to eat it up. By-and-by he ventured a little nearer, and began to whistle to the baby, who laughed and crowed with delight.

"I was very much obliged to you, boy," said Emily, sedately.

Grig asked nothing better than such an opening for conversation.

"Don't call me 'boy;' say 'Grig.'"

"That's not a name at all; haven't you got another? You couldn't have been christened so, you know."

"Little Dick came creeping towards him, and held out a large slice of cake."

"I never heard tell as I had any other name, but may be I have; I'll ask mother when we gets back; but everyone *calls* me

Grig, and anyhow I wasn't christened 'boy' neither;" and he resumed his whistling.

Emily had a book in her lap, to which, between the mouthfuls of sop which she was administering to the baby, she seemed to devote her attention. Grig asked what book it was. She was "getting her hymn for Sunday-school," she told him, and offered to read it out aloud; whereupon, crouching down and clasping his knees in the old attitude, he prepared to listen.

"I'd like fur to learn them lines," said Grig, when she had finished. "I'd like fur to say 'em to mother."

"How can you learn them? You can't read, I suppose;" this rather disdainfully.

"O lor', no! but I can learn 'em from you saying of 'em, same as I learnt 'The Lord is my Shepherd.' The teacher at the ragged-school taught me that."

"You shouldn't swear, boy; it's wicked."

"Didn't do no such thing," said Grig, indignantly.

"Yes, you did. You said, 'O lor'!' That's swearing."

"'Tain't, I tell you! *You* don't know what swearing is, you don't. Listen here, now;" and Grig was good enough to run over for her benefit a specimen or two of the oaths he was only too much accustomed to hear in Gutter Alley.

Thoroughly frightened, poor Emily put her arm round little Dick, as if to protect him from some dreadful danger.

"Go away, you bad boy," she said. "You hadn't ought to say such words: you're very wicked."

"No, I'm not," maintained Grig, stoutly. "I didn't say them words, not to *mean* 'em; only just fur to show you what swearing was, as you didn't know. Come, you teach me them lines 'fore I go, and I'll tell you 'bout the sparrers."

"Sparrows?" said Emily, inquiringly.

"Yes, them as our Father don't let fall to the ground without He knows it. I see 'em every day in London. That's how we know we'll get the 'daily bread;' we're o' more consequence than the sparrers. It's wrote down all about 'em in the Bible. I s'pose, now, you've got a Bible of your own?"

Emily stared at the little lad.

"Of course, I have," she answered, rather haughtily; but she released Dick, and let him play again, and taking up her hymn-

book began repeating, line by line, the verses she was learning, with a dim idea in her mind that she was doing something very good indeed—being a sort of little missionary—in teaching it to this poor ignorant boy, and feeling exceedingly self-satisfied and complacent. Grig was progressing famously, and they had fairly got through the first verse, when a sudden and violent box on the ear tipped him over upon his back upon the dusty ground. It was Granny, who stood there scolding: the dinner hour was up, and he must return to his work.

"Did she hurt you?" asked Emily. "She's a bad old woman that."

"I don't know as she is," said Grig; "not particular bad; leastways, not worse than some; and, as for hurting, why she can't hit hard enough not fur to hurt a *boy;* Granny's old, she is," and off he ran to his own bin.

From that day the acquaintance between the children was kept up. True, when her Aunt Martha was with her, Emily had no eyes for the little "foreigner," did not dare so much as look towards him; but on the days she was alone, many were the chats they contrived to have, and many the bit of plum-bread or rosy-cheeked apple she bestowed upon him. Granny was clever enough to turn this generosity to her own advantage, and dock Grig's allowance of bread-and-cheese in consequence.

"I can't abide waste, said she; "a hunch of cake like that is enough to keep him: what for should my hard-earned food go after it, where it's not wanted?"

Emily had lost her mother when the baby was born, early in the preceding spring; but, child as she was, she kept her father's house, minded the little ones, and, with the occasional supervision of her aunt, did all that there was to be done at home; it was only on washing days, as she used to boast, that she really could not manage without help. Grig talked to her of his mother, and how he was to take her back some hop garlands, and of all he was to tell her when they met again, and never knew that he, too, was motherless; for his "mammy" was no more in the poor room where he had left her, but "well and happy"—as she had said she would be—in the bright heavenly home. He talked of Molly, too. Susan Kaims had pointed out to him the little nameless mound in the churchyard where the child's body had been laid.

"She's gone to our Father in Heaven, Molly has," said Grig. "I s'pose them angels told Him as she wasn't happy along of Granny, and so He took her home; but then it's likely He knowed it without them telling of Him: He knows all about us, you see."

"What angels? what do you mean?" inquired the would-be missionary, considerably puzzled by her convert's manner of expressing himself.

"Them as goes about after little uns, and always sees the face of our Father. *That's* wrote in the Bible, too, same as the sparrers. Mother likes to think about them angels now I'm away from her, *I* know. There's a home for all of us where Molly's gone, but our Father ain't give me mine yet—nor I don't want Him to; I like this one very well," said Grig.

Whether he was wrong, he being alive and well, and placed here by his Heavenly Father, with, no doubt, some work to do, with surely much to rejoice in and enjoy; whether he was wrong—the call not yet being come for him—to be happy where he was, happy, and content to stay, that I leave my readers to decide. Emily decided without hesitation. There were times when she half fancied that Grig was not *quite* so ignorant as it had pleased her to consider him; that his simple faith—so honest in believing that what *was* was right; so wholly undoubting of the protection of Heaven; so constantly referring to it—might be even stronger than her own. Not that she could have put this fancy into words, though feeling it none the less for that. But to say it was better to be alive than dead, or that he liked it better! *that* reassured her quite as to her own superiority, and as to the fact of Grig being a poor ignorant boy whom she might aptly teach. She lectured away to her heart's content. "It was very wicked to prefer this world; he ought to *wish* to go to Heaven instead; and if he couldn't exactly wish to die, why, he ought to try to do so;" and the boy listened, and still felt the sunshine pleasant, and saw the green earth gay, and rejoiced in his young life, and after his own fashion was grateful to the giver of all good.

"When it's time, in course, I shall be glad to go; but I'm pleased it's not time yet. I likes this world very well," said Grig to all her reasonings.

VI.—GRIG MISERABLE.

On Sunday, when the women took advantage of the day to wash some few rags, and to mend others, which last was indeed a needful operation, if the garments of some amongst the children were to hold together at all, and while the men lay idle on the grass, smoking or sleeping as their taste inclined, Grig crept into church after Susan Kaims and Jim, and sat with them near the door, where they could slip out easily if Susan's baby woke and threatened to disturb the service. It rather disconcerted Emily, whose place beside her father was near to the one chosen by the hop-pickers, to see Grig there at all; and she felt, as she watched the boy's bent head and folded hands, a little ashamed to think how decidedly she had set him down in her own mind as so much less reverent than herself, just because of his queer uncouth way of speaking. She actually heard his voice, too, in the Lord's Prayer—the only part of the service in which little Grig ventured audibly to join.

In the afternoon, when the Vicar came to open the Sunday-school, Emily was lingering near the door, and looked wistfully at him, as though she had something on her mind. The sunshine was lying on the grass in the meadow, and on little Molly's grave in the churchyard; the school-bell was jingling overhead, and the scholars dropping in one by one, or coming in groups together down the road, some idle ones still poring over a collect that should have been perfect the day before, others, with consciences at ease as to their tasks, chatting merrily amongst themselves. The sun was shining, too, upon the hoppers' camp and the little bare-footed, ragged, dirty children at play upon the hillside, upon the listless figures of the lounging men, upon the women busy with their work. The Vicar had been thinking of them, and of what it might be possible to do for them during the four or five Sundays that they would remain in his parish.

"What has gone wrong, Emily?" he asked, kindly; "you look too sober for such a fine afternoon."

"There's a boy out there, sir," began the child, pointing towards the huts under the hedgerow.

"There's a good many boys out there, I think," said the Vica smiling; "but surely *you* know none of them."

"Only one, sir; he's a good boy, he was at church this morning; and please, sir, couldn't he come into school?"

It was a puzzling question. There came the neat groups of tidy-dressed children; there came the butcher's daughter with her shining ringlets in the best of order, who was to teach some dozen of them; there came the clergyman's own little girl, who also took a class, and the boys, whose especial pride it was that the Vicar himself taught them. To which class could little ragged dirty Grig, or his companions, be assigned?

"Suppose I was to keep school for those poor children all to themselves—out in the meadow, by-and-by; how would that do? Don't you think they might like it better than coming in here with you all?"

Emily assented brightly to this proposal, and, as the Vicar entered the schoolroom, glanced at its neat arrangements, and received the greetings of the assembled members of his own particular little flock, he decided that he had been right in not trying the dangerous experiment of introducing, amongst their orderly ranks, the ragged "foreign" regiment.

"Yet," said the good man to himself, "I will find some way in which those little ones can have a chance to profit by 'the crumbs that fell from the children's table.'"

And he did so; on that, and on each succeeding Sunday while they stayed, he gathered them about him on the grassy hill, and talked to them of their Father in Heaven, of the Home that was promised them, and of the way their little wandering feet must tread to get there.

By the second week, the few small fields near the church—which were always ready first—had been cleared, and the hop-bins were moved into the large one of many acres covering the slope of the hill opposite, and surrounding Belhurst Farm on two sides. A brook meandered under the edge of the great hop-garden, where it adjoined the orchard. In some places this stream was tolerably broad; in others, so narrow that a man could step across it easily; but, from its uneven bottom, it was here and there of dangerous depth. Crossing the stile, which, placed upon a broad foot-bridge built of planks, led into the orchard, a few steps brought you to the flower-garden, gay with old-fashioned flowers, and formal with old-fashioned beds and

borders. The late owner had died in the past winter, and his son was master of Belhurst now; master, he was wont to say, of the prettiest farm in the country. And pretty, indeed, it looked under the September sun. The beautiful hops, with their graceful festoons, when looked at near, and the soft rich green with which they clothed the undulating ground in the distance; the laden fruit-trees—apples, ruddy, brown, and golden; the bright flowers; and the comfortable house covered with a luxuriant virginia creeper, whose leaves here and there were just *promising* the glorious crimson flush with which they would welcome the first frost next month, made up a lovely picture. I do not know whether the little Londoners had an eye for the picturesque, whether they admired the landscape, but certainly they admired the apples; and—sad trial to their honesty!—laden branches stretched out over the hedge, over brook and all, in places here and there where the brook was narrowest, and hung their tempting burden within reach in the hop-garden. The branches were laden everywhere; there were almost as many apples as hops; even on the ground, in the orchard, whole heaps of fallen fruit were lying; and no one had leisure to pick it up in that busy season except little Johnnie, the farmer's two-year-old son, and the nurse-girl who attended him. Grig watched them often at this work, perhaps would fain have helped them; for in spite of the generosity which—after nearly all had been stolen—induced the farmer to announce that anyone might take the apples that stretched across the hedge, and really seemed to offer themselves to be taken, he had not had nearly enough. Very few had fallen to his share; and never once had he been persuaded into crossing the stile and robbing the orchard itself. Others were not so scrupulous. The boys were for ever scrambling over, and *just* escaping without being caught, and the farmer grew furious. "What did a few apples, more or less, signify in such a plentiful season?" his wife asked. To which he answered he would rather give away a bushel than have one ribston pippin, or even one green codling, stolen from him.

During the noon hour on a certain Friday, Grig, his dinner finished, was leaning against the stile watching the successful depredations of one or two lads who were taking the opportunity, while the farm men were dining, the house door shut, and the

white blinds of the front parlour drawn to exclude the midday sun, of filling their pockets from the heaps of fruit upon the ground. Now and then they called to him to join them, or he called to them to come away; still he could not resist watching them, or resist feeling a certain pleasurable excitement in the risk of detection they ran. At last he saw the house door open a little way. Was it Baby Johnnie coming out? It was so slowly and so gently pushed aside that it must surely be yielding to tiny hands. But no; in another moment Grig gave the alarm.

"Farmer's coming! run! You'll catch it this time, you will!"

He stood back as he spoke to let them pass. In hot haste they tumbled, one after another, over the style, and in half a minute were indistinguishable from any of the other white-headed dusty lads scattered over the hop-garden, and the farmer couldn't thrash them *all!*

Silly little Grig, his conscience being perfectly easy, had never run away at all, but stood there with his hands in his mites of pockets, chuckling at the escape of the enemy, and the discomfiture of the pursuer. But he felt himself roughly seized, and saw the stout stick the farmer carried raised to visit his companions' theft on his innocent shoulders. In vain he remonstrated.

"Didn't steal, didn't you!" cried the farmer, "and all my apples at your feet!" Grig noticed then that several did lie there in the dust, dropped in the hasty flight of the culprits. "If you hadn't told a lie about it, I might have let you off with a stroke or two; but now, you little rascal, I'll break every bone in your skin;" and blows very different from those Granny's old arm had power to deal, fell thick and fast upon the thin shoulders that so little deserved them. It was of no use for Grig to protest or to struggle, the hot-tempered farmer was thoroughly angry, and did not shake the child off into the hedge and leave him there until he had given him such a severe beating as, in his cooler moments, he was ashamed to think of.

Left to himself, Grig cried no longer. He lay under the hedge, feeling almost sick with passion. It seemed to him that such cruel injustice gave him a good excuse for hating one who had so ill-treated him. If he *had* stolen, he might have eaten his fill of fruit, and yet got off safe like the other boys; but just because he had not—because, remembering his repeated promise to his mother, he

never yet had been a thief—just through that, here he lay stiff and bruised, his word doubted, and, when he cried for mercy, getting harder blows in answer. It was no use trying to be good; better far be bad, and "enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." Though I doubt if he had ever heard those words, yet such was his thought; such the evil lesson which an angry man's injustice was teaching a child.

"I'd like to kill him, I would!" muttered Grig, writhing still with pain. "I'd like to do him a ill-turn; I *wish* I could."

When Bess came to look for him, calling to him that Granny was in a fine rage at his delay, he got up and slouched back to his work with such a different step from that with which he had left it, with a sullen dogged look upon his face that, in all his poverty and want in Gutter Alley, it had never worn until now. A blue-eyed toddling baby, that could hardly walk alone, came, singing to itself and staggering over the uneven furrows, and ran up against him, causing him to trip and nearly fall. The poor child thrust it roughly aside, with—for the first time in his life—one of those bad words uttered in sad earnest, the very mention of which had so frightened Emily. Such a change had come over Grig. Poor little Grig!

VII.—GRIG FINDS OUT THE CAUSE OF HIS MISERY, AND GETS RID OF IT.

THE sun shone brightly, the scent of the fresh hops perfumed the air, the voices of the "foreigners" were heard as they shouted to one another, or broke the silence with peals of rude laughter at some ruder jest, and those of the "home-pickers" kept up an unbroken murmur, like that of bees in a hive, as neighbours gossiped over their bins, working steadily all the same, for they had no mind that the strangers should find themselves in a position to claim the most money when the time came to "pay off." In a distant corner of the garden, little Emily, hard at work like everyone else, looked in vain for Grig; baby was curled up, fast asleep, under the shade of the big umbrella; and Dick, more troublesome even than usual, wandered so far and so often that his sister lost half her time in recapturing him. But Grig had no eyes for Dick, no thoughts for his new friends. All that hot still autumn after-

noon he stood at the bin, with a dogged sullen look upon his face, tearing the hops from the bine savagely, as if it was his enemy he had hold of, and he were tearing him limb from limb! That was what Bess said, laughing at him boisterously. As for Granny, she thought an undeserved beating was a famous thing, and wished it had happened before.

"Keeps a boy steady to his work," she said. He don't feel like larking to-day, nor won't for a goodish while neither, I'll be bound."

"Such a silly!" laughed Bess, pelting Grig with hops across the bin, "to take the apples, and then to wait and take the licking too. You'd ought to have cut and run, lad, like the rest of 'em."

"Didn't take no apples," said Grig, without looking up; "never touched of his apples—wish I had!"

"That's fine! Never touched one on 'em, and you as eat three only yesterday! Them as I give you, Grig."

"*They* wasn't stole," replied the child, lifting his heavy eyes to stare at her.

"Wasn't they? How do you know? how do I know, for that matter? I didn't ask no questions about 'em. Bob Links give 'em me, and I don't exactly think he growed 'em."

She laughed loudly, and threw whole handfuls of hops at Grig, and he angrily tore leaves and all from the bine, which brought down Granny's wrath upon him. She boxed his ears and made him pick out the leaves, and bid Bess let the child alone. When they did leave him to himself, the boy's heart began to swell with grief at the thought of his mother, and how she would have comforted him. More tears fell, but softer ones this time; after all it would be far better if little Grig could be sad only, instead of angry.

In the evening, when Susan Kaims, mindful of her promise to his mother, came to see how it had fared with the child all day, she found that he had already crawled into his tiny sleeping-place, where, although before he went to sleep he had cried with pain, feeling stiff and sore from the blows he had received, all his troubles were for a while forgotten, and he was at home again in Gutter Alley in his dreams.

Saturday passed in the same manner. So stiff, that he could hardly move without pain, Grig stood, with the same heavy scowl

upon his poor little face, picked his hops sullenly, and at dinner-time threw himself on the ground near the bin, and ate there the portion Granny bestowed upon him. Later in the day the farmer, with Baby Johnnie perched upon his shoulder, came through the garden, stopping here and there to have a chat with one or other of the home-pickers, and not without a good-natured word or two for some amongst the "foreigners." The little fellow, his hat crowned with hop garlands, and shouting for joy, made a picture worth looking at, and one which Grig had admired before now; but to-day he never raised his eyes, and felt a curious longing to rush at the farmer as he passed, catch him by the leg, and when he was down thrash poor Baby Johnnie, as Johnnie's father had thrashed *him!* He thought he *could* do it if he took his enemy by surprise, and felt as if he shouldn't much care if the farmer were to half kill him afterwards.

And so Grig nursed his wrath, and brooded over his wrongs, until the shadows deepened and night came on; and the moon looked down upon the poor angry child, and he dreamed his mother was dead, and woke up crying, and fell asleep again, and slept late, not waking till the sun was high, for it was Sunday morning; there was no work to do, and no one to care whether little Grig woke or slept; moreover, "sleep is cheaper than food," Granny said, "and *that* boy 'll not want no breakfast."

Susan was much disturbed that her little friend would not go to church that morning. He lay on his back in the sun, and answered crossly:

"What's the good of going to church? I'm tired: I'm going to rest, like other folk. You get out, Sue!" and kicked at her when she came near.

By-and-by, after afternoon service, when the Vicar came up the slope, and the ragged urchins, accustomed to him now, ran to meet him—most of them, perhaps, for the sake of the gay coloured pictures he brought with him, but some certainly because they liked to hear him talk—Grig would not stir. He lay under the hedge, and tried to keep his eyes shut, but found it impossible not to watch the group, and to wish himself amongst them; then persuaded himself that it was all the farmer's fault that he was not, though it is difficult to see how he made *that* out. At last when the Vicar had dismissed the children, he came so near

Grig's lurking-place in the path by the hedge-side that the boy had to get out of his way, and as he scrambled to his feet the clergyman recognised him.

"Why, you are the little lad who knows the Lord's Prayer so well; what is the matter that you did not join us all to-day?"

No answer; sullen silence; a downcast face, full of bad passions; a cross, obstinate, ragged, dirty boy; that was all. But the Vicar did not leave him as he found him, and pass on; he fancied there was trouble as well as temper in the childish face, and he tried once more.

"Yes, surely, now I look at you, you *are* little Grig; the boy with a dear good mother. You see I don't forget what you told me—the boy whose mother bid him be a good lad, eh? Can't you tell me what has gone wrong, Grig?"

The ice was broken then, the head bowed into the little brown hands, and the Vicar heard between the sobs that choked Grig's voice, the words, "Mammy, mammy! I wish as I was along of mammy!" It was easy to see, however, that home-sickness was not the only trouble, and late as it was the Vicar had no mind to leave this poor little wayfarer on the road of life, until he had tried at least to lighten his load for him. He sat down under the hedge then and there, and heard all about it.

Poor little Grig! It was not the beating, it was not even the injustice which had been making him so miserable; and a new light dawned upon him, his brow cleared, his eyes brightened, and he began to look once more like himself, as the Vicar pointed out what really *was* the matter. Grig had been miserable simply because he could not forgive his enemy.

That evening the master of Belhurst Farm was sauntering along the dusty road with his young wife's arm in his, returning from a pleasant Sunday walk, when a little ragged figure overtook them, and Grig, his hands full of blackberries, and singing merrily as he went, ran past. The farmer called to him to stop.

"Ah! I thought it was the same boy," he said. "You were looking glum enough yesterday, my lad—have you got over your punishment already? What makes you so gay to-day?"

"I don't know," said Grig, smiling up at him; "leastwise, unless it is because I've forgiven you, sir."

"You've done WHAT?" roared the farmer, dropping his wife's arm, and taking two strides towards Grig as he spoke.

"Forgiven you for thrashing of me," explained the boy, eyeing the uplifted stick, and keeping at a safe distance, feeling too considerably perplexed as to what his offence was now, though it was evident enough that he *had* offended.

"Oh! you have, have you, you impudent young blackguard! And if I thrash you again for your sauciness, what will you do then?"

The little bare feet shuffled about in the dust, still keeping ahead of the farmer, still watching the stick. Grig was on his guard this time, and did not intend to be caught if he could help it.

"Forgive you again," he said; "I'd have to, you know. If you was to thrash me seventy times I'd have to forgive you—seventy times seven," concluded Grig, shrugging his shoulders uneasily, as if the thought of so many thrashings was by no means a pleasant one.

"Seventy times seven!"—the farmer strode towards him, the stick raised in good earnest now: but Grig was too quick for him. Running up the bank, pushing through a hole in the farmer's own hedge, thereby doing damage under his very eyes, the boy fled, never pausing or turning his head until he flung himself on the ground at Susan's feet, where she sat on the sunny slope outside the huts, her baby in her arms, and Jim smoking his pipe beside her.

The evening shadows were lengthening. Under the yew-tree in the churchyard there was complete darkness, but Molly's grave was in sunshine still; the smoke from Jim's pipe curled lazily up into the air; Sue ate the big blackberries which had been sadly crushed in Grig's flight, and laid her baby down to kick and crow upon the grass. The boy in silent content, with the cloud of anger gone from his brow, looked at the lovely view, and at the sun near setting, and now and then selected a particularly fine berry, and swallowed it thoughtfully.

"Do you know about the trespassers, Sue?" said he. "I never heard tell of 'em till to-day. It's them as does us bad turns, you know, and we've got to forgive 'em. We ain't got no call to *tell* 'em so—it's best ways *not* fur to tell 'em, I should think," he went on meditatively, and recalling his own experience. "I never did

think of the trespassers before, I s'pose because no one never did me a bad turn till now." (Little Grig was all unmindful of Granny's hard words and ways, and of her many blows.) "Our Father in Heaven's very good: *He's* forgive us a lot, and He's give us a lot, too;" and Grig looked gratefully round upon the sunset colours in the sky, upon the green meadows, and the blackberries, and there was not just then a more contented or a happier little spirit in all the world.

"Our Father in Heaven is very good to us." In spite of the want in Gutter Alley, in spite of his late pain and trouble, in spite of Granny's unkindness and his own friendless state, such truly was the result of little Grig's experience; such the impression the Vicar's Sunday lesson had left upon his mind.

VIII.—A WRONG FORGIVEN AND A WRONG REMEMBERED.

THE last week, then the last day, of the hop-picking had come. Everyone was grumbling; the villagers, because, as they said, "with such a sight of foreigners, how was it likely they would pay off well?" and no one knew yet the rate at which they would be paid.

"Not a farthing more than a penny a bushel, you'll see," said Emily's aunt; at least, not for our best hops; for the or'nary ones, maybe, we shall be paid at eight for a shilling."

Then she scolded Emily, who was already working as fast as her fingers could move, and bade her hurry so as to pick as many bushels as possible before night.

Granny grumbled, and distressed herself amazingly, just because of this possibility of any poles remaining unstripped after nightfall. In that case it would be out of the question to take the parliamentary train back to town. The Londoners would loiter on all day, and begin to drink up their earnings even before they started. She cared little enough for the poor wives and mothers in the wretched courts to which they were bound; but it concerned her honour that *her* party should go back with full purses: once at home, no one less likely than Granny to trouble herself whether men were drunk, or women miserable, or little children starving. At first she worked Bess and Grig, and the other girls she "did for," harder than ever, in the vain hope of clearing the field that

day: then, in the still vainer one of leaving occupation enough for the morrow to keep the men from the public-house, she suddenly relaxed her efforts, and ended by releasing the younger members of her party much earlier than usual from the bin.

By this means Grig contrived to wish Emily good-bye. Her aunt had left early in the afternoon, and at evening Grig helped, for the last time, to pack the crazy perambulator, turned somersaults for Dick's edification, whistled his best for that of the baby, and finally, turning once more head-over-heels in the very act of saying good-bye, ran back along the dusty road, wondering to himself at the queer choking feeling in his throat when he thought that he had seen the last of them.

"They was good to me, they was," he said. "I'll tell mother about 'em."

The thought of his mother recalled a private plan he had formed, the remembrance of which caused him to turn his steps towards the large hop-garden, empty and stripped now, which surrounded the farm, and led him to the identical corner of it where stood the stile, and where he had fallen into so much trouble. Grig's plan was this. The blackberries were nearly all gone, it was hard to find one in the dusty hedges now; but in that shady corner there grew a cluster of late berries that had taken long to ripen, but had grown at last to be the very biggest, blackest, and sweetest that he had ever found. He had watched them anxiously, afraid of any other eye lighting on them, of any other hand despoiling him of his hidden treasure. For these were "mother's berries." His heart beat when he pictured to himself the dry parched lips refreshed by the ripe fruit. How pleased she would be! If only no one else had taken them. He would satisfy himself with one peep to-night, and early to-morrow carry them off in triumph. Silently, stealthily, for fear of attracting the attention of any of his companions, little Grig crept towards the spot. Yes, they were there still, the tempting beautiful clusters. As he stood contemplating them, and thinking of his mother, longing to be with her once more, hardly able to contain himself for thinking how near the meeting was, the choking in his throat came back again, and tears of mingled love and pain filled his eyes.

Little motherless Grig! No one had cared to tell him what his mother had not been able to tell him herself before they parted.

It was dusk before he turned to go, but his attention was caught by the flutter of Baby Johnnie's white frock. The child was at play in the orchard by himself. Probably he had made his escape through the open door, for Grig heard the mother's voice calling "Baby!" from within. But baby had no intention of returning; rolling an apple before him, and heedlessly trotting after it, when the apple fell plump into the brook, Johnnie fell there too. There was no cry—only the slight splash, and the mother's voice calling "Baby!" again from the house. The child had fallen on his face; the water and mud together stopped his breath. If Grig had not been there, Baby Johnnie's voice would never have answered to his mother's call on earth again. As it was, when she came into the garden to seek for her lost little one, a dusky figure dimly seen through the gathering darkness was stooping over the brook, and Grig, with the child in his arms, met her half-way down the walk.

She took the dripping bundle from him.

"What was it? I heard no noise: oh! *what* has happened?"

"Wasn't no noise to hear. He fell face downwards, he did; but he's all right now, missus," for, as he spoke, Johnnie's breath came back, and a loud roar gave satisfactory evidence of his being still in the land of the living.

"Face downwards! Oh, my Johnnie!" His mother, clasping him tightly to her heart, turned towards the house, and little Grig, whistling as he went, recrossed the stile, jumping over it—into the very arms of the farmer. "At it again, eh?" An angry shake was followed by a blow. Grig began a confused explanation, but was not listened to.

"*I* saw you, creeping along like the thief you are. I determined there should be no mistake *this* time. There! off with you;" and after a sharp stroke or two he let the boy go, calling after him: "You forgave me last thrashing, did you, you young hypocrite? Perhaps you'll wait till I ask you to forgive me this time."

Grig ran on blindly, stumbling over the uneven ground in the fast-failing light, not knowing, not caring where he went, feeling half-mad with rage. He came to the gate of the farmyard at last, the yard where, amongst other buildings, stood the oast in which the fire, as is usual during the hop-picking, was kept up day and night. In that place the evening air was heavier even

than elsewhere with the scent of the hops. The boy leant panting against the gate. "I hate him! I hate him!" he said to himself.

"Grig, with the child in his arms, met her half-way down the walk."

A dark shadow lay in the doorway of the oast; by-and-by Grig pushed open the gate and went to see what it was. A man

was there, lying on the ground in a dead sleep, or perhaps in a fit, he could not tell which, but he knew it was the man who should have been turning the hops as they dried, and guarding against accidents from the heated furnace. Stepping over the prostrate figure, Grig entered the building, and plainly smelt fire. For one instant the devil got uppermost; Grig executed a war-dance on the lower floor, clapping his hands as a whiff of smoke from above put the matter beyond all doubt.

"The hops is burning! Oh my, what a lark! He's done me a ill turn, and his hops is burning all up; let 'em burn!"

The next moment better thoughts returned.

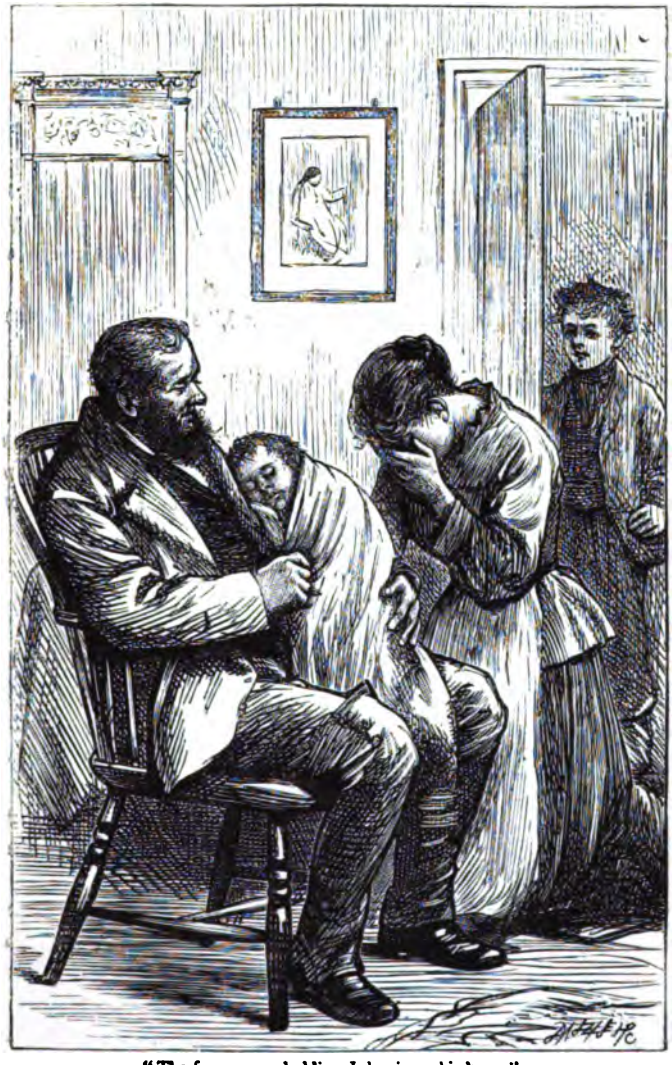
"We've got to forgive 'em when they does us bad turns; he's done me another, so I've got to forgive him *again;*" and clasping his little stained hands tightly together for half a second, Grig set off as hard as he could run, to return good for evil.

Being a bright boy, he did not lose the time which was so precious by seeking for any of the farm men, of whose whereabouts at this hour he was entirely ignorant, or even by running to the hoppers' camp to fetch help from thence, but made straight for the house, with the intention of telling the person chiefly concerned, namely the farmer himself, the danger his property was in. The watch-dog barked furiously, and tugged hard at his chain as Grig ran by; in the darkness he splashed right into the duck-pond, and when he scrambled out again overturned two hen-coops; but still, in spite of all delays, hardly three minutes had elapsed before he found himself at the back door. No one, for a wonder, was in the kitchen; no one, at least, but a great white cat, who set up her back at the intruder. Grig pushed on towards the passage beyond, and then without hesitation threw open the door of a room in which he heard voices.

It was the front parlour. The farmer was there, holding Johnnie on his knee; the dripping little garments lay in a heap upon the floor, and the rosy laughing child was wrapped in an old crimson shawl. His mother knelt beside him; she was crying, for in telling the story of his peril the poor thing had broken down altogether and become hysterical. At the sound of the opening door, all turned in surprise at the unexpected apparition of the ragged dirty little figure standing there.

"Oast's on fire!" Grig said; then repeating the words once

more, to make sure they were understood, and seeing the farmer rise up hastily and place Johnnie in his mother's arms, he turned



"The farmer was holding Johnnie on his knee."

and ran again. This time away through the front door, through the little garden, over the dewy grass in the orchard, across the

unlucky stile, and from one end of the large hop-garden to the other, until the slope above the church was reached, and the brown huts, looking like ghostly shadows, were within hearing. Then was Jim Kaims, and all the other men about the camp, roused by Grig's cry of "Fire!" and the steady ones went off to see what assistance they could render, while others followed them "to see the fun." As for little Grig, he flung himself down outside the huts and laughed.

"Such a run I've had," said he to Susan; "there won't be much harm done, not if many on 'em is as quick as I was. The place wasn't but just alight, and the hops hadn't catched fire, I don't think."

"If they're saved, 'tis you saved 'em, lad," said Susan; "farmer ought to be thankful to you, I'm sure."

"He took and licked me again to-night."

"Never! Why, what was it you'd been after?"

"Hadn't been after nothing at all, only picking his boy out of the water;" and it struck Grig as so comical that he should have earned a beating by saving a baby's life that he laughed heartily.

Apparently there is some wonderful difference between the effects of an injury forgiven and one revengefully brooded over!

After all, there was no "fun" for the idle lads to see. The alarm had been given in time, and the fire was easily got under; the farmer had only to thank those who came with offers of help, and to dismiss them all with a promise that at paying-off time on the morrow he would remember the fact that it was one of the pickers who had saved him a great loss.

"It shall be eight bushel to the shilling all round," he said; "no such thing as a penny bushel shall come off Belhurst Farm this year."

The men gave a cheer for the farmer; and then someone was heard saying out of the darkness that they ought to give a cheer for little Grig too, upon which they did so, and came whooping and shouting back to the camp, rousing the boy from his first sleep, and making Granny crosser than ever. She was terribly afraid that they were all getting tipsy upon credit.

IX.—JUSTICE AT LAST.

GRIG was steadily at work next morning—Granny kept him and Bess closely to the bin, as though she had a mind to clear off all the rest of the hops herself—when the farmer came into the garden, evidently looking for someone in particular amongst the few pickers still engaged there. Presently he caught sight of our hero, and came towards him.

He said nothing at first, only put a hand on the boy's shoulder, and stood looking down at him; then he gave him a little shake—probably a way of expressing emotion of some kind or other, or else of suppressing it, for his voice was husky when he did speak.

"I've heard what sort of mischief it was that you were after in my orchard last night, lad," he said; "but for you my own boy might——"

Here he broke off suddenly, and began again afresh, first giving Grig another little shake, while Granny stared at them both, for she had heard nothing about the orchard, and wondered why the farmer did not mention the oast.

"To think of my thrashing you for it, too!" he went on. "And by the way, I told you to wait this time, till I asked you before you forgave me, didn't I? Well, I ask you now. Shake hands, little lad; forgive and forget, eh?"

Grig held out a brown paw.

"Oh, yes, sir; I forgive—and it wasn't so bad as last time, neither," he added, with a queer shrug of his bruised shoulders.

The farmer now began to ask several questions of Granny—to whom he seemed to take it for granted that little Grig belonged—about the lad; and Susan Kaims standing by, her own work over, was amused to see that the old woman claimed a right in him. She had the wit to perceive that Grig was the hero of the hour, and fully intended, if luck came to him, to secure her share of it. Susan fancied the farmer seemed inclined to keep Grig on the farm, and give him work there; but Granny was making it so evident that she could not be parted from him, that he appeared to meditate some other reward—a reward which it was certain would in the end benefit Granny, and not Grig. Susan bided her time, and when the farmer turned away, followed him, and they stood talking together under the hedge. Granny's keen eyes

looked them through and through; she only wished her ears had been able to reach as far. Grig looked that way too, and wondered at Susan having so much to say, but never supposed it concerned himself.

Meantime Susan was describing the real state of the case—the absolute friendlessness of the orphan boy—and venturing to beg the farmer to carry out an intention he had hinted at, of giving the boy employment at Belhurst.

"What's his age?" asked her hearer.

"Can't say as I know his age exactly," replied Susan; "going on for ten, or thereabouts; but he's handy, sir—that handy as you wouldn't believe it, and a willing lad, too. You see, sir, town boys have to get their living early. Grig's earned his this long time."

"And he has no friends—no one belonging to him, you say?"

"Never a one, sir. There's no one to see to him more than there is to the birds of the air—leastwise, only Providence;" and Susan held her own child more tightly with, it must be confessed, a little doubtful wondering in her mind, as to whether friends *would* be raised up for the orphan, a little curiosity as to how things would go with him. "He's sharp, too—a very bright boy is Grig, sir," she added, fully resolved to keep her promise to Mary Field, and do her best by speaking up for him.

"Sharp? why, yes, he showed that last night; I had forgotten the oast, by the way;" and the farmer retraced his steps to the bin.

"You are the lad who gave alarm about the fire, I think, and were bright enough to come straight to me. Now I want a boy with some sense in his head—what do you say? will you take work here at Belhurst? He should board with the ploughman," he added, addressing Granny, fancying she looked doubtful of the plan. "If he chooses, he can be worth his keep and a suit of clothes. My wife happens to want a boy to see after poultry, and run errands, and be at her beck and call all day; and of course we'll see to his schooling." Much Granny cared about his schooling. "Come, my lad—what do you say? Not afraid of *this*, are you?" and he held up his stick, laughing.

How the boy's face lit up! Such a picture as flashed before

his mind's eye of the dull, dark London room, and the anxious fight for daily food! and then to glance round upon the green fields, the woods, the pleasant country, and to think of spending his life amongst it all!

"Could mother come too, sir?" he asked. "I couldn't leave her, you know."

The farmer looked at Susan.

"I thought you told me——" he began; and she, shaking her head sadly, drew little Grig out of Granny's hearing, and told him at last what they had all been sure of for so long—that his mother wanted him no more, never had wanted him all this time, but had died while he was in the hop-grounds.

They were surprised at his distress, surprised at his obstinate refusal to believe them.

"You haven't had no written letter; you haven't had no word at all! How *can* you tell?" he cried, and said he must go back to his mother. "She would have told me, sir, you know," he repeated.

"But she didn't want to cut you up, Grig," said Susan; "she didn't want to make you fret. It's as I tell you, lad, be sure of that."

But it was of no use to argue with him. "If he's left behind, he'll only run away," said Jim; "best let him go along of us, and I'll see him safe started back again when once he's satisfied himself as his mammy's really dead and gone."

Granny maliciously hoped the farmer would not think it worth while to have the child sent back, if once he went away; but on the whole, his new friend was favourably impressed by the strength of his feeling for his mother, and, with the remembrance of little Johnnie's rescue warm at his heart, he did not hesitate to agree to Jim's suggestion.

And it was settled so. Grig went back, squeezed up in the third-class carriage, just as he had been squeezed before, but carrying his hop-garlands, "mother's berries," and as many rosy-checked apples—not stolen, but a free gift from Belhurst—as he could contrive to hold, for he persisted in bringing them all; though, poor boy, he could hardly have cried more than he did cry, even if he had fully believed the news he was so resolute in doubting.

Arrived at the London terminus, he kept with the others through the streets that were strange to him; but as the way grew familiar, the child hurried on so fast that when he reached Gutter Alley he was far ahead of them, and quite alone. Alone he turned into the well-remembered mews, glanced up at the little dusty window, then with hasty trembling steps passed up the crazy stair, and threw open the old door.

What a change met his eyes!

Where the mattress had once lain upon the floor stood now a four-post bed, and lying across the foot of it, in a drunken sleep, there was a man who seemed to have thrown himself down at night in his clothes, and forgotten altogether to get up when morning came again, for his tattered coat was on, and his feet encased in dirty boots. A woman sat sewing under the window. Two squalid unhealthy-looking children, hardly more than infants, were on the floor at her feet. She turned her head at Grig's entrance, and stared at him for a moment, but bent it again over her work, not noticing him further, never heeding the little ragged boy, who stood in the doorway holding his green hops, and clasping his armful of rosy apples as best he could.

"Mother!" cried Grig, with a sharp pained cry; but the woman only shook her head silently, without so much as looking at him again; too busy at her work, too occupied with her own troubles, to think of his. One of the apples fell and rolled across the floor towards the children, who struggled to reach it, and began a feeble wailing when their efforts to do so failed. Grig turned then, and, letting them all fall as he went, rushed down the staircase, down to the cellar, in whose dampest corner Frump sat mending stockings. The child burst in, and flung himself down upon the stones. It was no use asking any questions: he knew already that Susan had spoken the truth; he only sobbed out, "Mother, mother!" and asked had she wanted him, and was Frump sure as she had done the best she could for her.

Mrs. Badger gave him the old prayer-book, and told him his mother "never had wanted for nothing, for the Lord had took her the same night as Grig left, and, for sure, it was a mercy."

She did not know how to comfort him, but she patted him once or twice as he lay sobbing on the stones, and he felt it kind of her,

and by-and-by wandered out into the yard to watch for Joe, and was quite cheered to find how pleased he was to have the hops to stick behind his horse's ears, and how pleased to see Grig again, and how full of interest in his plans. As for the blackberries, Joe and little Grig shared them during their chat together.

"No cabs nor 'osses down yonder, I reckon," said Joe, as he washed his cab and twirled his mop about the wheels; and then Grig expatiated upon the size of the farm cart-horses, and lost himself in dreams of ever being set to rub one down or harness it.

When night came, he cried himself to sleep in the corner of the cellar, where Frump made him welcome; but still, I think, even in those first hours of his grief, it was, as his mother had said it would be, a comfort to him to remember her words, to remember how she had told him she should want for nothing, but should be very well and happy while he was away. He began dimly to see how true these words of hers had been, and why.

In the early morning Jim saw the boy off by the train. Joe came out into the yard to say good-bye, and putting into his hands a sausage-roll, by way of a last present from old friends, he said: "Think of us while you eat it, lad; you'll have forgot all about Gutter Alley by the time the taste is gone."

"No, no," Grig said; he never would forget them—any of them, least of all Joe Garnell, and he begged him to give his love to Kate and Jenny.

Susan, still mindful of Grig's mother, bestowed upon him a rough kiss at parting, and wondered why her eyes should grow so dim as the little figure, trotting by her husband's side, turned the corner, and so passed out of sight. As for Granny, she had never troubled herself to ask after the boy, or wonder where he was, since they had all got back to Gutter Alley. There was nothing to be done "in the way of business" with Grig now; her interest in him had ceased.

The farmer was standing in the sunny porch, tossing Baby Johnnie up and catching him again, when the shabby little figure appeared, and Grig's voice was heard saying:

"I've come back, sir. Mother don't want me; there ain't no one wants me. It was true what Susan said; mother's gone to heaven, sir, and I've come to stop with you."

The last we see of "little Grig" is the childish figure standing on the threshold of a new life, Baby Johnnie staring at him, open-eyed, and Johnnie's mother giving him a nod and smile through the front-parlour window; but let us take one peep at Belhurst Farm some ten years later.

The hops that had been gathered in the big field year after year were once more ready to be picked: the apples were ripe again, and the blackberries gleaming in the hedges, when Gregory Field —no one called him "Grig" now, not even his wife—stood one evening leaning on the stile over the brook. Work was over for the day, but he was waiting for someone or other before he set off to the ploughman's cottage, his own now, and, as everyone said, by far the neatest and prettiest cottage on the farm. Presently a young woman carrying an infant in her arms came in sight, walking slowly along by the hedgerow, and singing to her baby as she went. Gregory crossed the stile then, and went to meet her.

"Hop-picking begins to-morrow, Emily," he said, as he took from her the child, who had been kicking with joy, and stretching out its arms to him, from the first moment it had caught sight of him at all.

"Yes, I know; the place swarms with foreigners already."

"Hush! don't say nothing about them, wife," laughed the young husband. "I remember when you was very good to one such. *You* mustn't talk against the foreigners."

At this they both laughed, and then paused in their walk to watch a band of hop-pickers moving up the old slope above the churchyard. Perhaps they both gave a thought to Gregory's orphaned childhood; perhaps his own mind had gone back to far-off days in Gutter Alley, and, remembering them, a grateful thought may have arisen of the "goodness and mercy that had followed him all the days of his life." Emily was the first to speak again:

"You were a poor miserable little creature, to be sure; he" (meaning baby, now occupied in pulling his father's hair, and in vain endeavours to poke his father's eyes out) "won't never be like that, I hope."

"He might be worse off, as it has turned out," said Gregory. "And I don't know as I was thinking how *miserable* I was. I believe something was running in my head as my mother used to

teach me; something as we'll teach this little chap, soon as ever he knows what 'tis we say."

"What's that?"

"We'll teach him as he has a Father in heaven, and how 'all things work together for good to them that love Him.' There's many as says them words and don't not to say *believe* 'em. Now, *I* believe 'em; you see I've tried 'em, and I *know* they're true.

TWO ROSES.

A DAMASK rose opened in the garden. It was of such a rich deep crimson that it seemed to glow and burn in the sunshine. It noticed the butterflies flitting round it, and the bees sucking its honey, and it believed that no flower had so sweet a perfume, and there never before was such a colour as its own. Certainly, in the garden it could see nothing so grand, though, as the breeze blew, it kept turning its head to right and left, looking at the other bushes that grew all along between the path in front, and the high hedge behind. There were yellow roses, and white, and pink, and blush, that is white tinged with red; but not another damask rose-bush, and on this one only the one blossom had opened—the one that was such a marvel of rich colour, large size, sweet perfume. Was it any wonder that the damask rose was proud?

Outside the garden there was a place that the rose knew nothing about. It was a grassy lane, the boundary of the garden, a fine

thick hawthorn hedge forming one side of it; and through this hawthorn hedge wild roses trailed. Countless were the blossoms, with their yellow hearts and their round of white petals

tinged with the faintest pink. One of them was so delicately coloured, so large and soft, with the green leaves spread round it, that it surpassed all the others in beauty. But this poor rose had got into its head the idea that it was no good in the world. There was only one thing that made it feel pleased and a

little bit conceited. It saw two dogs fighting in the lane. Ugly yelping curs they were, and they raised the dust and spoiled the summer stillness.

"I am glad of one thing at least," the rose thought, "that I am a flower and not a dog. These dogs like to hurt each other, but we hurt no one. I am glad I am not a dog."

When the curs were gone and the place was quiet again, a boy and his mother went by.

"What are dog-roses, mamma?" he asked.

"Those creeping through the hedge, dear."

"But those are wild roses, mamma."

"Dog-roses is only another name for them," she said, passing on.

The rose listened, and hung its head. A deeper flush stole over it, and died away again.

The little boy tried to pluck it, but he ran away screaming with pain, for his hand was torn by the thorns.

"So I *can* hurt people after all," it sighed with great bitterness. "What good am I? And yet if I were no good, I should not have been made. I will watch and wait. Oh, if I could make some one happy before I die!"

II.

THE very evening after it was full blown and perfect, the damask rose was plucked, and laid in a basket with a great many other flowers, most of which had grown in the conservatory. The gardener gave the basket to a maid, who was neatly dressed with bows of blue ribbon, a silk apron, and a white French cap. She took all the flowers out of the basket, and, cutting off their stems, drove a wire up into each. Then she twisted all those wire stems together, and ran them down into a holder of white paper, all worked and embossed round the edge. After this she looked at the bouquet, holding it first on one side and then on the other; and saying in French, "Madame will be pleased with that, or she has bad taste," she set it on a table in an open window, and left it there.

Later on, in the dusk of the long summer evening, the maid came back for the bouquet, and carried it upstairs to a dressing-room, where there were already bright lights with tinkling and

sparkling lustres hanging beneath them. There were mirrors and bright pictures on the walls. The chairs were covered with velvet, the hangings were of silk. Altogether it was a place full of luxury, and there sat a lady all in white, dressed ready for a ball.

"You have been a long time, Jeanette," she said, as the maid came in. "I am tired of waiting."

Jeanette only said, "I am sorry, madame; I was trying to make the flowers look well," and she showed her the bouquet.

"Oh, they are lovely!" her mistress said, holding up her white hands all sparkling with jewels. "That crimson rose is the most exquisite I ever saw."

How proud the rose felt when the lady in white lace took the flowers in her hand, and went to the mirror to see the effect of her dress. Then for the first time, looking in the glass, it saw itself, and it glowed so brightly for joy, that its breath came fast, and the lady said—

"What a perfume that flower has, and what a burning colour! Jeanette, you must take it out of the bouquet; I shall wear it in my hair."

Jeanette did as her mistress ordered; and the rose almost fell down—it was so overpowered with pride and conceit when it found itself atop of the lady's head.

III.

As the summer evening was darkening, two boys came along the road gathering wild roses. One of them was well-grown, about twelve years old. The other was quite a little fellow, having a straw hat and a linen coat tightened round his waist with a belt. They climbed up against the hedge, and between scratches from the hawthorn branches, and pricks from the thorns of the roses, they kept shrieking at one time, and laughing at another, while they tried to put up their hands gently and cautiously among the twigs.

"How many have you?" asked the elder boy.

"Two, four, five, seven, nine, ten, eleven, twelve," said the little one.

"Oh! I have fourteen. I think we have enough now. We must be home before dark."

"No," said the small boy, with the straw hat; "let me get just one more?"

"I will give you one of mine," the other replied, readily; "then we shall have thirteen each."

"I am so glad, and that is a beauty!" the little fellow cried, joyfully, as he was given the rose that we saw a while ago on the tree, hanging its head in sadness. But before they had gone far the night was coming on, they had to hurry, and the rose dropped by the wayside in the dust.

Just then a carriage dashed by, with spirited horses prancing before it, and lamps already lighted. Within was a gentleman with a lady in white, who carried a bouquet of flowers. From its high throne among her dark hair the damask rose peeped out of the window, and saw the wild rose lying by the wayside, and it thought, "Surely there is no flower so precious, so prized, so happy as I."

And the poor pale blossom, almost crushed by the carriage wheel, sighed, "Alas! I am no good, and my life is worthless. Even when I made the little boy glad I could not stay with him. Oh! if I could make some one happy but once—and die!"

IV.

THE damask rose saw a great deal of pleasure and gaiety that night. It was in a large brilliant room, where countless lights were burning. On every side were hung garlands of flowers and wreaths of green leaves. Music was going on loud and joyful, and as the lady joined in the dance, and went whirling among the rest of the bright figures round the room, the rose saw itself many times, when she flitted past the mirrors on the walls, and every time it was filled with the same old thought—that surely it was the most beautiful flower in the world, and its own the happiest and most precious life.

But the ball came to an end. The rose suddenly found itself in the fresh, cool air for a few moments, and then in the carriage again, rushing first over the noisy paved streets of the town, then out on the country roads, with the lamps sending a white gleam into the darkness all the way. Then the drive was over, the rose was in the dressing-room again. Jeanette took it out of the lady's hair. It felt quite crushed, from having been squeezed against the carriage cushions all the way home, and now the maid's arm knocked it off the table as she passed, and it lay in a dark corner forgotten. The other flowers that formed the bouquet did not fare much better. They had no stems, but only wires, so they were laid aside as useless things that could not be kept alive, while the few roses were broken up, and left to perfume a dressing-table The damask rose, down in the dark crevice between the table and the wall, withered and died, and the dry, shrivelled leaves fell asunder.

V.

It was early morning. The lark was trilling out its glad song over the moist green fields, and far, far up into the clear radiant sky; new wild roses opened in the hedgerow, the grasshoppers chirped, and the butterflies whirled through the air. Everything seemed happy and full of life at the sight of the country in its fresh green morning robe, and the strong white light of the sun. A country girl walked along the road, carrying on her arm a basket, in which were heaps of green-podded peas, at the other side some gooseberries, and on the top of all bunches of garden flowers. In her big strong boots she tramped gaily along the road singing, with her linen bonnet shading her rosy face from the sun.

She stopped: at her feet lay a wild flower closed and dusty. Not a glance of hers had turned towards the roses in the hedgerow. She did not want them; such hedges were round the garden at home, and such roses too. But she picked up the wild rose from the dust, and laid it in a snug corner on the gooseberries. The flowers in the basket were not her own. She was taking them to the town, where she would not arrive for an hour yet, and there at the market she was to sell for her mother the load she carried in her basket. But this wild rose *was* her own now, and somehow the soft loving heart that had lived always in the fields and sunshine took pity on the faded little thing, as if it had life and was in distress.

VI.

The bright morning sun shone on the town, on the spires, with their glittering weathercocks, the slated roofs, and long rows of houses. In the poor neighbourhoods poverty looked worse than ever, there was so much light to show little old tumble-down houses packed close together, dusty windows, broken panes, and wretched shops, that got down their shutters slowly, like lazy people that will hardly open their eyes though day is come. Out of an alley, where the meanest and poorest hovels stood crowded together and leaning against each other, a little child walked in the early morning. It was not long after sunrise when she stepped out into the streets, and felt the clear, cold air blowing her rags about, and stirring her fair curls, and fanning her cheeks. Other children would have run and bounded for joy in its freshness, but it chilled this poor little one, as she hurried along with her bare

feet on the stones. In her hand she carried three match-boxes. Mother was ill at home, and father was out of work. He had tried hard for something to do, but he could get nothing, and she had heard him say last night, oh! so bitterly—

"I'll try no more. Luck is against us, and if I did get work to do, my strength's gone. If a man is to starve, why, he must starve!"

So the child had come out in the early morning to try and get a copper or two to buy bread for the sick mother and the poor disheartened father. Last night she had failed to sell her matches, but perhaps she would have a better chance now. Her face was white, even her lips had no colour in them, and between the sorrows at home and her own hunger, she felt so weak and weary that her cold feet trembled, and now and then the houses seemed as if they would swim round, and the pavement heaved like water.

As time passed the business streets were crowded with men hurrying by, each bent on his own affairs. The child ran through the moving crowd timidly begging one here and there to give a copper, and holding out her hand with the matches.

"No, no, be off!" said one.

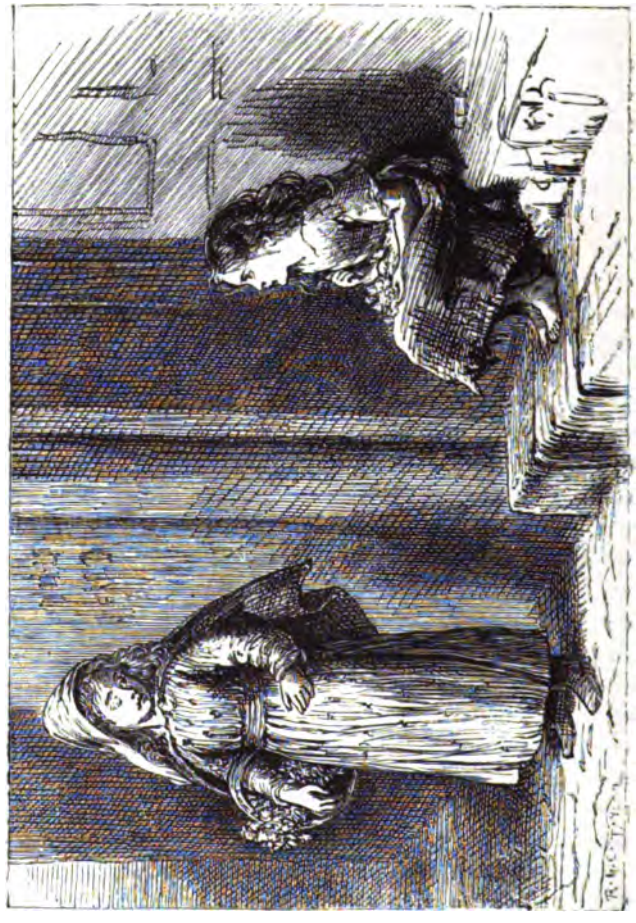
"I don't want them, I tell you," growled another. "Don't follow me any more."

When one man stopped for a moment near her, she began to tell her tale of misery, but he walked on, giving something like a laugh, and saying to his friend:—"It's the old story. What a face these children have to tell it! There's always some one sick at home when they want to get their matches sold."

The morning was wearing on. Would she have to go home and say she could sell nothing? Had her mother awakened even now, thirsty, with only cold water to drink; hungry, with nothing to break her fast? The thought was too much for the little tender heart. She had been out two good hours now, and she was ready to faint. She left the wide street, and in a quieter one sat on a door-step, and clasping her hands, prayed to God to take care of mother. Her little frame shook through and through, the tears blinded her, but she was too weak to cry.

Suddenly something touched her hand. She brushed the tears away, and looked. It was only a flower that had been dropped nto her lap by a girl carrying a basket. She raised her eyes and w the rosy country face turned back towards her, looking out

from under the sun bonnet with a kind, pitying, smiling glance. Then the girl turned away and walked on. But the flower remained. There it lay on the soiled tattered dress,—a small white



blossom, tinged with pink, closed, dusty, and half withered, with a few green leaves hanging to its stem. The little act of kindness, the thought that some one cared for her enough to throw her a flower, roused her and gave her courage. She would try again to sell the matches. Back she went to the crowded street, and

approached a young man who was taking a cigar out of a beautiful silk-lined case.

"Matches, please, sir?" said the little one, looking at him with pleading eyes.

He felt in his pocket and handed her a penny. "Stop," he said, suddenly, before taking the box. He saw how white and wasted was the little wistful face, and he ran his hand down into his pocket again. This time a shilling came out and went straight from his hand to hers. She looked up. How could she thank him! She tried to say something, and tears and sobs came instead of words, and when she brushed the tears away, her friend was gone. But this time the shilling remained.

The child went home, taking with her a good breakfast for all, and her father heard her story about the flower that was thrown into her lap, and how she took heart when she saw it, and tried again, and was given a whole shilling.

"I'll try again," he said; "I thought I wouldn't; but I'll go now, and God give us luck!"

That day he got work, and had he not sought it so early another would have taken his place; so it was really the child's story that gave him courage and made him succeed.

"I shall get better now, darling," the mother said, kissing the small pale face that evening, "for we shall have plenty when father is at work, and you shall have shoes, and a new dress, and a hat by-and-by to keep out the sun."

"Yes," the child said, putting her cheek down on the pillow; "but I don't want the shoes, mother; I want to have you better, and it will be so nice when you are well."

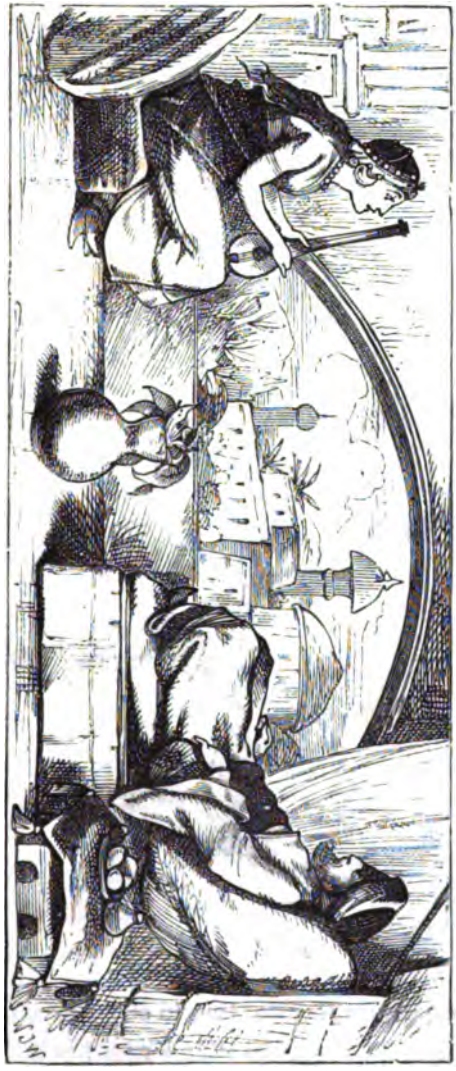
Then she looked at something which she had quite forgotten in taking care of her mother all day. It was the wild rose in a broken glass full of water standing on the table at the other side of the bed. It had opened wide, showing its heart yellow as gold.

She ran round and kissed it, crying out, "Dear little flower! It made me sell the matches, and that made father get work, and that will make mother better." But all at once the wild rose fell to pieces. She thought her kiss had broken it. No, the wayside flower had died of joy; and on the end of the stem only the yellow seeds were left—its golden heart.

THE CALIPH AND THE WIDOW.

WHEN the cross in Spain was broken, and the Moors her sceptre swayed,
In his royal town a Caliph a fair, stately palace made:
Pleasant was the wide-arched mansion, with its quaintly-figured walls,
And the silver-sprinkling fountains in its marble-paven halls,
Arabesques filled every chamber with a wild fantastic grace,
And the Koran's golden ciphers made a mystery of the place;
Rich the tracery of each lattice, carven sharp with master-craft,
And the mouldings wrought like lace-work on each tall and slender shaft.

"Near the palace a poor widow had a small paternal field."



"Only this one charm was wanting to complete all to his heart,—
But no bribe could tempt the widow with her little plot to part.

Wearied with his vain entreaties, he at last put forth his hand,
And raised up his dome of pleasure on the violated land."

Sudden glimpses of trees waving, with a freshness to the eye,
Came through pillared courts all open to the soft blue summer sky;
And around it were sweet gardens, sunny clumps of scented bloom,
Dusky umbrage, shadowing alleys with a cool delicious gloom.
Near the palace a poor widow had a small paternal field,
Where the Prince a fair pavilion for his pleasure wished to build,—

"But she went before the Cadi, and bore witness to the wrong."

Only this one charm was wanting to complete all to his heart,—
But no bribe could tempt the widow with her little plot to part.
Wearied with his vain entreaties, he at last put forth his hand,
And raised up his dome of pleasure on the violated land.

Weak and friendless was the widow,—her oppressor proud and strong,—
But she went before the Cadi, and bore witness to the wrong.
On a day the Prince was walking in the garden planted there,
With a joyous heart beholding his pavilion shining fair;
The old Cadi then came kneeling, and implored, in lowly mood,
Leave to fill a sack beside him from the soil on which they stood.

"The old Cadi then came kneeling, and implored, in lowly mood."

It was granted, and he filled it; then the old man, turning round,
Asked the Caliph to assist him while he raised it from the ground.
Smiled the Prince at the entreaty, thinking all was done in mirth,
Raised the sack, but dropped full quickly his strange burden to the earth.

"It is heavy," said the Cadi, "and thou canst not bear the weight;
Yet, 'tis but a little portion of the widow's whole estate.
Side by side with that poor widow must thou stand at Allah's bar;
And in that majestic presence prince and beggar equal are.

"Side by side with that poor widow must thou stand at Allah's bar."

And if thou, O Prince! are burdened with a load of earth so small,
What wilt thou then answer Allah, when he charges thee with all?"

The sharp arrow reached his conscience, and, atoning for his guilt,
Like a king, he gave the widow the pavilion he had built.

"The sharp arrow reached his conscience, and, atoning for his guilt,
Like a king, he gave the widow the pavilion he had built."

THE PRINCESS WITHOUT A HEART.

I.

ONCE upon a time there were a king and queen who had no children. The queen, it is to be supposed, had always forgotten to put the bread-basket outside the palace-gate on the nights when the angels brought the babies down to earth to find fathers and mothers for them. However that may have been, both the king and the queen were quite middle-aged folks before a little child was born to them, and then it was only a daughter. Of course, they were disappointed, for they had made up their minds that it was to be a boy; but having got their little girl, they were forced to make the best of her, and they determined that she should turn out something very remarkable. So when she was quite a baby—before she was christened—they carried her between them, or perhaps I should say turn and turn about, up a steep hill, to the castle of a very celebrated magician who lived in the neighbourhood.

"Now then, what can you do for our little one here?" asked the king. "Do you think you could turn her into a boy?"

The wizard shook his head. "I'm afraid if I tried that, I should only make her a tom-boy," he said.

"Well, do the best you can," returned the king; "we want her to be something quite out of the common. As indeed our daughter should be," he added, proudly; and he slipped a handful of gold into the wise man's hand, which gold the wise man immediately pocketed before answering.

Then, after some consideration and consulting of learned books, he said, "I can do three things for her; I can make her either very amiable, or very beautiful, or very clever; you must choose which you would prefer."

The king scratched his head, and in doing so nearly knocked his crown off. "All my family are very clever," he said.

"I'm sure I shouldn't have thought so," returned the queen, rather sharply, "and I don't know what particular good cleverness is to do a woman;" for this was before the days of high-class female education.

"All my family are very amiable," she went on, reflectively.

"I'm sure I shouldn't have thought so," retorted the king, in his turn.

"I should like her to be beautiful," said the mother, not heeding this thrust at the time, but making a mental note of it.

"Well, then, let her be beautiful," said the king.

"In this case if I bestow the gift of supreme beauty on the child, I must warn you," said the magician, "that she will have no heart. I shall be obliged to take her heart away."

"Dear me!" said the king, "that seems awkward. How will she get on without a heart?"

"Oh! remarkably well, I assure you," returned the magician; "lots of people in the world do. In fact, perhaps she will get on better than if she had a heart."

"She couldn't have heart-ache, to be sure," said the king, meditating.

"No," returned the queen, "and really I don't know what good a heart is to a woman. It is sure to be crushed and trampled upon by a husband, if she is ever unlucky enough to own one."

This was paying the king back with interest for his late misbehaviour.

In the end it was agreed that the princess should receive the gift of beauty, and the magician then and there took a little pair of diamond scissors, and cut out her heart. Then he put round the baby's neck a silver chain with a tiny silver heart attached to it, and bade the mother be careful this was never removed. "For," said he, "if the chain is taken from the child's neck you will lose her; she will turn at once into a bird, and fly away."

"I think you ought to have told me that before," said the queen, rather frightened.

"Oh! you've only got to be careful," said the magician.

"Of course," repeated the king. "You've only got to be careful. The child is to be the most beautiful maiden in the land. Won't that satisfy you? And what have you to do besides

looking after the child? I shouldn't think you'd think that a trouble."

You see as the king hadn't to look after the child himself, he didn't mind the trouble.

II.

PRINCESS BIANCA—so the little baby was called—grew up, as the magician had promised she should do, the most beautiful maiden in the whole country. Her skin was pearly white, her eyes were heavenly blue, and she walked with a grace and dignity unsurpassed. It was as though a swan were sailing along the surface of a glassy lake. Everybody who came near her admired her—poets wrote verses about her—painters begged with tears in their eyes that they might be allowed to take her portrait, and half the young nobles in the kingdom wanted to marry her.

The worst of it was, she had no heart, so she couldn't fall in love with anybody in her turn; but she would encourage each one of her admirers, show him a thousand pretty little airs and graces, and then, when at last he fell on his knees and proclaimed his love, she would laugh in his face, or perhaps box his ears, or at best tell him, with her sweetest smile, what was quite true, that she had no heart to give him.

So matters went on, until there came as a guest to the king's castle a knight from foreign parts, called Rudolf.

Rudolf was young and handsome, with dark glowing eyes and an olive skin, such as Bianca had never seen before, for all the people in the country where Bianca lived had sandy hair and ruddy-white complexions. Rudolf sang, too, most beautifully, and seemed to enjoy singing the songs of his own southern land in his rich, full voice, as he sat at Bianca's feet. Of course, Rudolf fell in love with Bianca. That was to be expected. And he made himself very agreeable to the young beauty, walking with her, riding with her, and, as we have said, singing songs in an unknown tongue to her, from morning till night.

Meanwhile Bianca was heard to remark that he was an amusing young fellow, which was a great deal for her to say of any of her adorers.

At last, Rudolf, unable to keep silence any longer, told the

princess how much he loved her. This was as they were riding through the forest, one evening after the chase.

"Dearest Bianca, be my wife," said the knight.

"What nonsense, to be sure!" returned the princess. "Do be quiet, and let us have a nice comfortable canter."

But the knight would not be quiet; he kept repeating to the princess his love for her, and begging her to marry him.

The princess got so tired of this that at last, just by way of silencing him, she said:—

"I think you're very presuming; you must know I am a princess, and very remarkable. Is it likely I would marry an unknown knight who has never done anything the least remarkable? Go away to the wars and do something to make yourself worthy of me—if indeed you want me."

The knight checked the words that seemed rising to his lips. Then he bowed low to the princess.

"Fair lady, I will do your bidding," he said. "You are right, and I bid you farewell." With that he put spurs to his horse and galloped away into the depths of the forest as fast as he could.

"Stop! stop!" cried the princess.

The knight, if he heard her, paid no heed, and never so much as looked back.

"How very disagreeable of him," said the princess to herself. "He promised to sing me a new song this evening, and now, if he's killed in the wars, I shall never hear it."

The princess came home to the palace in a very bad humour, on account of the knight's behaviour.

"I think it was so rude of him to fly off in that way. I hate people to make a fuss," she said to her mother. This was at supper.

As she spoke, the queen gave a great cry.

"What is the matter?" asked the king, in a fright. "Has your mother swallowed a bone, child?"

The queen shook her head, but held out her arm and her long forefinger, pointing towards her daughter with a terrified expression. It was some moments before she was able to speak, when she gasped out,—

"The silver heart, child—belonging to your chain—it is gone—where is it?"

The princess put up her hand to feel her necklace.

"Yes, it is gone. What a nuisance! However, you can easily give me another. It doesn't much matter?"

"Don't talk like that," cried the queen; "haven't I told you, you must guard that necklet—as—as you would your life. Unhappy child—that locket must be found."

"Well," said the princess, "that's easy enough, to be sure. I was only in the forest, and it must have dropped there."

"A search shall be made," said the king, solemnly; and immediately he ordered out a hundred men to take lanterns and torches, and to go into the forest and examine every path, and to peep under all the stones, and under all the blades of grass, and under the shrubs, and the trees.

"Leave no stone unturned," said the king. But when every stone in the forest had been set rolling, there was never so much as a trace to be found of the princess's silver heart.

"Somebody must have stolen it," said the queen, weeping bitterly.

III.

After the loss of the locket, several very remarkable things occurred at the palace. One of the most remarkable was that the princess was heard to sigh.

"My dear child," said the queen anxiously, when this occurred, "what has happened to you?"

"Oh, nothing—only I was thinking it would be nice to be a bird."

"A what!" shrieked the queen. "Don't talk in that dreadful manner, my dear."

"I should like to be a swan," said the girl, not taking any heed of her mother's distress, for of course she had no heart. "In this hot weather it would be so nice—wouldn't it? And if I were a swan I'll tell you what I'd do, mother: I'd float down the river to that country where the war is going on, and go and see some of the fighting."

"Oh! my dear child," sighed the mother, "I wish you wouldn't talk like that; and the idea of your wanting to see the fighting! it sounds so horrible, so heartless! If you haven't got a heart, my poor Bianca, I wish you'd try not to show it."

"Heart? I dare say I've got as much heart as anybody else," retorted Bianca.

"That's all you know about it, my poor dear," said her mother, sadly.

Another very remarkable thing was that the princess took a fancy, about this time, to solitude. She did not want amusing so much as formerly, but she would be found now in the garden, and now by the bright river that flowed before the palace, lost in a kind of day-dream, with her lovely blue eyes fixed on nothing in particular, and her beautiful white hands crossed idly on her knees. Sometimes, too, she would be heard singing to herself, very softly, songs in an unknown tongue; and more than once the rumour of a great battle—for battles were always going on in those days—brought up a delicate rose-flush to her face.

About this time the king and the old magician, who lived on the mountain near the palace, had a very serious disagreement.

The way of it was this. The wizard, for all his learning, was certainly not more honest than he should have been, and he had for a long while been aiding and encouraging a gang of robbers who had been giving the king a vast deal of trouble. The old magician not only secreted the robbers, but he secreted their booty too. This the king found out; and marching an army to the old wizard's castle, he threatened to burn his house over his head unless he gave up both men and spoil, and paid a fine for his bad conduct besides.

This the magician was at at length forced to do, for magician as he was, he couldn't stand fire; but he did it with a very bad grace, and he determined in his wicked old mind that he would be revenged on the king.

Of course, he knew that the easiest way to touch the king would be to work mischief on his daughter, the beautiful Bianca; and the old magician set his brain to think how he could get the girl into his power.

As it happened, she fell in very easily. All the wizard wanted was to get her to give up the silver chain she wore about her neck.

And he managed it in this way:—

To disarm suspicion, he assumed the form and guise of a venerable-looking old country-woman, for he could thus change his

form at will. Thus disguised, he watched his opportunity, and at last found the princess sitting one day quite alone on the bank of the river. The princess was so lost in thought that until the old woman was right in front of her she did not see her. Then she looked up with a start.

"Don't be frightened, pretty maiden," said the old woman, in a low, sweet voice. "Ah! your thoughts were far away; it is so with the young—I can understand. I once was young myself."

"That must have been a long while ago," said Bianca, in her usual heartless fashion.

"Ah!" returned the old woman, "faces grow old, but hearts keep young."

"I don't know anything about hearts," said the princess; "I don't believe I ever had one."

"Tut, tut; so lovely a lady must have had dozens laid at her feet."

"Oh, yes! very likely," returned Bianca; "I didn't mean other people's—I meant one of my own."

"You were wishing just now, when I came, to be where your heart is," said the old woman.

A faint little blush stole over Bianca's fair face.

"That's rubbish!" said she, "because I tell you I haven't got a heart. Ask my mother, if you like."

"Do mothers know everything?" enquired the old woman, with a wise nod. "You were wishing," the wizard went on, "to be where that flowing river leads, in the south and sunny land, where the fruit ripens into gold upon the trees, and where the nightingales sing by day in the scented myrtle groves."

"That is like a song he used to sing," murmurs the girl, dreamily.

The wizard smiles; and as Bianca sits gazing down upon the bright and shining river, he scatters a few grains of golden dust upon her head.

"The spell is working," he mutters. "You would like to pass, swift as a bird, along that smooth and glistening pathway, to those fair, far-away regions," he goes on, softly. "You would like, with your own eyes, to make sure that in that sunny southern land is to be found no maiden so beautiful as Bianca. But, alas! wish no such foolish wishes, maiden. Were you to go, shall I tell you what

you would see? You would see that your knight was faithless; that the songs he sang to Bianca are now poured into another ear: that the words of love he spoke to her are spoken as freely to a maiden of the south, dark-skinned and bright-eyed, who gives him back smile for smile; that he has forgotten the peerless Bianca, or only laughs now at the folly, which, for a moment, made him captive to a heartless girl."

"Oh! you cruel, wicked old woman," cried Bianca, jumping up and stamping her foot. "I don't believe you know a bit about it. You're telling me a heap of stories; but all the same, I'd give my eyes to be there, and see for myself."

"You need give nothing so precious, my lovely princess," returned the false wizard. "Give me but that silver chain about your neck, and you shall have your desire."

Bianca was in such a rage that she quite forgot all that her mother had said to her about the silver chain, and how she had bidden her never take it from her neck on any account.

"If that's all that's wanted, there it is," she cried, pulling it off with a wrench.

At the same moment the magician gave a cry of malignant pleasure, and the old woman and the maiden disappeared together; and nothing was to be seen but a large and snow-white swan, that ran flapping its huge wings along the bank, and plunged into the stream.

IV.

When the princess couldn't be found, high, low, or anywhere about, there was a terrible to-do in the palace. The king stormed, the queen cried, and all the court had a very bad time of it,

At last, the idea struck both the king and queen that the old wizard was at the bottom of the matter.

"That horrid old fellow!" said the queen. "I was always afraid some ill would come of your threatening to burn his rubbishing old castle. I wish, with all my heart, that you'd left him and the robbers alone."

"My dear," said the king, solemnly, "my duties as a king——"

"Oh, rubbish!" returned his wife. "Never mind them now; think about your sorrows as a father!"

The king at last determined to go and see the old wizard, and to

" A swift arrow pierces Bianca's breast, while
pushes the little sk

unter, with a cry of joy at his own prowess,
r, to pursue his prey."

find out, if possible, whether he had anything to do with the disappearance of Bianca.

The magician received the king with great civility, and professed to be extremely sorry for his trouble.

"The dear child must have lost the necklace somehow," said he. "It is a sad pity; she is now, without any doubt, turned into a bird."

"What is to be done?" asked the king. "For pity's sake tell me; I will give you half the riches I possess if you will restore my child to me."

"Well," said the wizard, "you haven't behaved altogether kindly to me; but as I am not of a revengeful spirit, if you will pay me down seventeen millions of brass farthings" (this was the coinage of the country) "I will tell you the only way in which you may reclaim your daughter; but I must have the money first."

The poor king sighed, but immediately ordered all the carts and horses in the kingdom to be got ready to carry the seventeen millions of brass farthings up to the sorcerer's castle. It took a long time, for the road was excessively steep and stony; and, all the time, the king and queen were in a terrible fever of impatience to know how they might regain their lost child.

At length, when the very last cartload of farthings was delivered, the wizard said—"One who loves her must recognise her, and call her by her name, under her new shape. Then she will resume her own form; more than that, she will no longer be without a heart."

For a wonder the old magician told the truth; for he considered there was so very little chance of the princess's father and mother finding her in this way that he did not think it worth while to invent a falsehood.

"Dear me!" said the king; "is this all the information you can give us? I don't see that it does us much good. How in the world are we to find the poor child so?"

"Ah!" returned the wicked old wizard; "that is your look-out, you know."

So the poor king and queen wandered about all over the forest, calling to every sparrow, and to every linnet, and in the farmyards they called to every duck and goose the name of their lost daughter, hoping thereby to find her; but, of course, they were unsuccessful in their search. For Bianca, the snow-white swan,

had sailed away far out of their ken, down the broad and shining river, into the sunny southern land, where the fruit ripens into gold upon the trees, and where the nightingales sing by day in the scented myrtle groves.

But for a long while she did not find her lover. For, of course, being only a swan, she could not travel far over land, but was obliged to keep to the course of the shining river, as it wound through the wooded hills, or to the blue lakes, that lay hidden between the mountains.

Poor Bianca was nearly giving up her quest in despair, and her heart was ready to break—for since her transformation she had had the true heart of a woman beating in her snow-white swan's breast—when at length she came upon Rudolf. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that Rudolf came upon her.

She had found her way over moor and fen, just as the sun was dying in the west, to a lonely mountain tarn, where she hoped to rest awhile in her weary flight, undisturbed by the pursuit of man; for many a time she had been in danger of her life from the cruelty or greed of ignorant rustics and clever sportsmen.

Scarcely has she begun to plume her ruffled feathers in the clear water of the lake when the sound of a hunt rouses her. She trembles in every snowy feather, and seeks to hide among the rushes that line the sides of the lake. Suddenly she hears words —a voice that thrills her; it is Rudolf's. She rises; she flutters towards him in an agony of hope and joy. Alas! she has no voice to tell him that it is his love—Bianca.

"Ha! what is this? a wild swan, as I live!" cries the young man. "This is famous. I must take a shot at it."

At these terrible words Bianca turns, and spreading her white and glistening wings, flies from her lover. He pursues her; jumping into a small skiff, that lies ready on the shore, he seizes a bow and arrows from the hands of one of his companions, and lets fly at the startled bird.

A swift arrow pierces Bianca's breast. A horrible pain seizes her; she sinks helpless and exhausted on the sedgy bank, while the young hunter, with a cry of joy at his own prowess, pushes the little skiff towards her, to pursue his prey.

Suddenly, as the light fades away from her eyes, and the world reels round as on a pivot, a voice comes to the dying swan: she

sings her song of death; but it is the love song of the south, which Rudolf himself taught her.

The young man listens a moment, bewildered—amazed; then, as the clear, plaintive notes of his own native melody ring out on the still sunset air, he gives one gasp—one leap to shore.

"Bianca, Bianca!" he cries, with outstretched arms, and within them enfolds, not the dying swan, but a living, loving woman.

As Rudolf is king of that southern sunny land, we may be quite sure that Bianca becomes its queen; and by-and-by she sends a messenger home, to her own far country, with these words,—

"DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER,—Your little daughter has found a husband, and has grown a heart."

And King Rudolf took as his crest or badge a swan; and when he and his queen had been married ever so many happy years, King Rudolf showed to his wife a treasure, which he had kept wrapt up in a dozen little folds of silver paper, and always wore in a tiny silken bag suspended from his neck.

"Do you recognise it?" he asked. "I suppose if everybody had their own, this should belong to you."

"Oh!" said the queen; "it's my heart, to be sure, which I lost in the wood, all those years ago. Well, as you've had it so long, I think you may as well keep it altogether."

As for the old magician, when the king, Bianca's father, found out what cruel trick he had played him, you may be sure he got the punishment which he deserved.

OUR ROSIE.

"OUR Rosie be a very harmless child."

That is what Bennet will be pretty sure to say to you if you speak to him of the one girl in his family of rough lads. His meaning might perhaps puzzle a stranger, since to look at Rosie not the most timid imagination could suppose her capable of harming anyone, so that such an assurance seems, to say the least, somewhat uncalled for. Neither does the sight of her suggest that she has more than her fair share of the mischievous propensities common to her tender years; and, in point of fact, Rosie tears fewer frocks and soils fewer pinafores in the week than most of her companions, and can be trusted to do any errand steadily. A quiet little lass, with light hair and blue eyes, and a sunny smile on the round face, whose rosy cheeks tell as plainly of soap and water as they do of fresh air and plentiful meals; a little maiden who is a perfect picture of a village child, and might sit for a new "Age of Innocence," had we a new artist capable of painting one. The remark Bennet is so fond of making merely means that his little daughter has a certain friendly and winning way with her, that goes straight to people's hearts, and makes her a favourite everywhere.

Such is the recognised meaning of the word hereabouts. Mercy Bright, who lives in the ivy-covered cottage at the corner, where the sweetbriar in the hedge scents the air so strongly on a summer's evening, and where the children find the first violets in spring—Mercy, with her gentle voice and smile, and the friendly words she has for everyone, is a "harmless" woman, just as Rosie is a harmless child.

Rosie is friends with every one. The roughest of the men, as they go backwards and forwards about their work, or turn in at the Crown and Anchor of an evening, have a kind word or nod for her. Even when some amongst them come away with unsteady

steps from that door near the cross roads, and other children run past quickly, she never hurries, but goes by with half-averted looks,

"Monday was a week I gave a pound of blackberries to our pig; they *was* just ripe."

full of a strange childish pity. The worst of the poor fellows must be far gone indeed before he would frighten Rosie.

The other day, when some young ladies staying at the Hall took

it into their heads to go blackberrying along our lanes, where the tangled briars stretch for miles, and the fruit is every autumn in such rich plenty, they came upon Rosie walking home demurely from the shop, her mother's basket, almost as big as the child herself, hanging on her arm. Deeply interested in the proceedings, and moreover rather wondering at them, Rosie spoke at once.

"Monday was a week I gave a whole pound of blackberries to our pig; they *was* just ripe."

"To the pig! why, what a shame!" The girls laughed at this friendly little person who accosted them with such small ceremony.

"He liked 'em," says Rosie, smiling. "Don't pigs like things same as other people?" She set her basket carefully in the hedge—for, to put one phase of Rosie's harmlessness negatively, as her mother was apt to do, "she was no ways random"—and began, as a matter of course, and without invitation, to help to fill the baskets of the young ladies, prattling all the time with so much artlessness and modesty that the strangers fancied themselves in Arcadia.

You do see such children now and then, who invite the confidence of all, seem sure of kindness from every one they meet, and hardly to know what the word stranger means. Rosie knows it so little, that the one fault her mother finds with her is that she has no manners.

"Our Rosie will speak to any who come along, tramps or what not; and, if you'll believe me, she'll up and speak to the gentry themselves, just as soon as to you or me! She don't appear to see the difference in folk: I tell her she ain't *no* manners," said Mrs. Bennet, upon the occasion of the blackberry-gathering just alluded to, though indeed the poor woman is in constant perplexity from a similar cause; as, for instance, when the young squire was at home from college once, and Rosie meeting him at a time when her heavy basket was heavier than usual, had asked him in the prettiest way in the world to "feel the lift of it, and help her with it for a bit," and "thanked him kindly" as he set it down laughing at the cottage door.

"Do 'em good to be spoke to now and again as if they was flesh and blood like ourselves," grumbled an old lady, whom her neighbours knew to be the most smooth-tongued amongst them when anything was to be had from Hall or Rectory.

"For my part, I've always homaged my betters," replied Mrs. Bennet, good-humouredly; "and I've brought the lads up to do the same; but Rosie, now, 'tisn't that she's anyways bold, but she've *no* manners; she don't so much as wait for the gentry to speak first,—and they don't seem to mind it neither," the worthy woman added, in a puzzled tone. Where was the good of trying to teach Rosie manners, if the gentry encouraged her in these evil ways?

Of course they do not "mind" it. The child speaks to every one she meets, or whose way is the same with hers when she goes to and from school. Singing to herself as she pulls wild flowers in the hedges, or stands amongst ripe corn almost as high as the head over which no more than eight summers have yet passed, she puts her innocent questions, and makes her little remarks to any, gentle and simple alike, who cross her path, and no one ever has minded it yet. In fact, she is "Our Rosie" to all the village, to the Squire's family, and the other resident gentry, no less than to her own companions, and to every hard-working man and woman in the place. The Vicar in particular is a great ally of this small parishioner of his, and declares she does much good. "Even a child is known by its ways," he observes, and says the harmless ways of Rosie, so good, so innocent, so docile to his teaching always, are very pleasant to him.

When asked, as he sometimes is, What good the child can possibly do? the Vicar answers that to *be* good is, more often than we think, to *do* good also; that so friendly a little soul makes every one friendly round her, and is a bond of union amongst us; and he winds up always with his strongest point, "And then there's Martha Finch," the Vicar says; "you can't deny that was a great work of our Rosie's."

At one time there certainly was an exception to the almost universal favour with which Rosie was regarded. There is none now—none since the child unconsciously brought sunshine into the darkened life of the only person who looked coldly upon her.

The smallest house in the village is that next door to the Bennets', so small a house that it seems as if it must have been originally part of theirs, and sliced off on second thoughts to afford accommodation for another family. It consists of two rooms only, one above and one below; for though a scullery

adjoins this latter, the proportions of the room are curtailed by just the space the scullery occupies, and it is just that much smaller than the room overhead. There is a slip of garden before the low door, and the fence dividing this slip from the larger one of the Bennets has always been kept as carefully in repair as though it actually formed an effectual barrier against possible inroads of the little Bennets, instead of being so low that a two-year-old baby can see over it. The really effectual barrier between the two families was, for long, Mrs. Finch's way of "keeping herself to herself," and the somewhat disdainful estimation in which she was known to hold, not the Bennets only, but most of her other neighbours.

It was the death of her husband that had brought her back to her native parish, and with her a year-old babe, in whom the very existence of the mother seemed bound up. Having been long away there were few who remembered her, and the idea prevailed generally that, to say nothing of the "genteel" Hastings lodging that had been her married home, it was a sad come-down for Martha Finch, after living for years as head housemaid in a titled family and marrying the own brother of the butler, to return to the village at all; for she had nothing to look to now but field-work the same as her neighbours, and hard, often scanty fare, such as theirs was.

Perhaps it was her own consciousness of this come-down in life that made Martha Finch hold her head so high, as with tight-shut lips, never parting in kindly interchange of gossip with the other women, and with frowning brow, she went to work in harvest-time, or during hopping, where, holding on to the bin into which her mother's busy fingers picked, the little girl first learnt to stand alone, but was kept then, as always, apart from the other children in the place. There were not wanting some to wonder jealously that Mrs. Finch demeaned herself to field-work at all; but, although no one looking at her could forget for a moment her eminently respectable connections on her husband's side, a respectability betrayed in every fold of her dress, even when it grew to be more and more faded and worn—no hard work seemed to come amiss to her.

Nothing came amiss to *her*, but it was soon evident that life for little Lizzie was to be as easy as her mother could make it. Though seldom allowed to mix with the "common children," as Mrs.

Finch styled them, the little girl accompanied her mother from time to time when she went to drink tea in the parlour behind the shop, or the cosy bar of the George Inn, the landlady of which had been herself a servant in "the first families," and looked upon Martha as an equal, appreciating properly the immense distance there was between her career and that of the numberless girls who left their cottage homes for service in ordinary places, and came back to marry labouring men.

The butler brother-in-law came down once or twice while Lizzie was still a little creature, and toddled up the street holding by her uncle's forefinger. He put up at the George, but the great being was not above taking a friendly glass at the Crown and Anchor, after he had said good-night to his sister-in-law in her tiny room, where they had taken tea together, and where, owing to the spotless cleanliness and neatness, and to the photographs of "my lady" and the young ladies and gentlemen that adorned the walls, they might almost have imagined themselves once more in the housekeeper's room of the tall town house in which they had shared so many meals in former days.

It was my lady up in London who paid for Lizzie's schooling, stipulating only that she should be sent to the National School and to no other, and who had undertaken to provide her start in life when she was ready for it.

It was only reasonable Martha Finch considered that with such a prospect the child should be taught to keep herself to herself, and not brought up exactly like those who had nothing to look to. The National School was not what Mrs. Finch would have chosen for her daughter; and though the little girl was sent regularly enough until she had reached the top of the first class, no sooner was that position attained than the probable object of my lady's wise stipulation was defeated by her being withdrawn altogether.

By the time Our Rosie first began to trot down the long hill to the school-house, Lizzie, then a tall, pale slip of a girl of thirteen, had ceased her attendance there. She read her book at home, her mother said. She certainly did a great deal of crochet work there, and began to exhibit a talent for trimming her Sunday bonnet, and producing an effect with an end of ribbon, that was really surprising in one so young. In fact, though Lizzie had been trained to keep the tiny house in order, and did it quite as well as the ex-head-

housemaid herself, that threatened to be the girl's only valuable accomplishment. She was growing up half-educated, with notions above her station, and a most complacent trust in everything being done for her, as not a few girls of her class do grow up, when mothers are foolish, and expectations from others rob them of the spirit of independence. Was it a hard saying, I wonder, or too sadly true of a good many in the village, that saying of our shrewd Scotch doctor, "If you help one of these people over a stile, they expect you to carry them home?"

Perhaps harder work might have been better for Lizzie both physically and mentally, for, as the neighbours said, she was "but a dwiny, pale-faced thing," though they could not but own that standing in the cottage doorway, and dressed in the light prints her mother made her, and with her eternal crochet needle in hand, the girl did look "genteel."

Many a homely word of kindness came to Lizzie across the low fence, but it was only Rosie, who ever since she could stand up by it and peep over the top had seemed wholly unconscious of any difference between herself and their next-door neighbours.

For Mrs. Finch, "high" with every one, was doubly high with the Bennets—those great, rough lads, and the little girl allowed to spend her time, as Lizzie had never been at any age, with the tribe of children generally to be seen playing in the dusty road that formed the main street of the village. These children were the very little ones, too small to be sent alone the long mile to school; and well was it for them that from her tenderest years "Our Rosie" interested herself in them, for no one else did so. And—saddest of all sounds!—bad words from baby lips were too often heard amongst them at their play, that is when Rosie did not join it. When she did, she had a little motherly way of keeping them innocently amused that "must," Mrs. Bennet thought, "be good for them," for which reason she never interfered, but allowed the child to do as she liked on holidays, or the long afternoons of summer, when there were still several daylight hours after school was out.

The summer that Lizzie reached her sixteenth year her taste for finery and predilection for a quiet genteel business decided her career, and my lady fulfilled her promise by apprenticing the girl to a milliner in Hastings. It was a hard parting for the mother.

With her lips more tightly pressed together even than usual, and her face grave and stern, she stood at her own gate as the carrier's cart disappeared slowly down the road. The colours of her cotton gown were faded from frequent washing, and it was much patched and darned, while Lizzie's clothes were good and new; but to all outward appearance Martha Finch was, as she had ever been, eminently respectable, and quite sufficient to herself, though inwardly her very heart was sinking, and she knew that the light of her eyes had been taken from her.

"I doubt she takes it hard, though she ain't one to show it; we all know how she be bound up like in poor Lizzie," observed Mrs. Bennet, glancing through her window.

The same thought, or one akin to it, must have been in Rosie's mind, when she suddenly threw her arms round her stern neighbour, and, looking up in her face, exclaimed—

"We'll miss Lizzie ever so much, and we'll be ever so pleased when she's home again!"

Knowing of old that the friendliness of Rosie was irrepressible, Mrs. Finch did nothing worse than shake the child off somewhat angrily, and bid her mind her own business, for no one asked *her* to miss Lizzie. The repulse, though only what might have been expected, called a hot flush to Mrs. Bennet's cheek.

"There's ne'er a one but her in the place as would serve our Rosie so," she muttered; but the child herself only walked more slow than her wont up their own garden, and entering the cottage observed thoughtfully—

"Mis' Finch be that put out to lose Lizzie as makes me main sorry for her, mammy; I feel like to fret, I do," upon which, however much it might have relieved the good woman's feelings to comment upon "Mis' Finch's" behaviour, she kept her thoughts to herself, and said nothing.

Through all that summer Lizzie's mother worked as hard as she had ever done, laying by her earnings for her daughter, and still asking for no sympathy in her lonely life, but keeping herself to herself in her old fashion. When autumn came, however, little as Mrs. Finch "neighboured" with anyone, it was plain to all that she had some deep cause for anxiety, even had not the rumour arisen that millinery, or Hastings, or both together, were not agreeing with Lizzie, and that her health was failing. By the winter she

was once more at home, the bright spot upon each cheek, the dry, hard cough telling their own tale.

The short, aimless life was drawing to a close, while our Rosie was strong and hearty at her work and play.

Mrs. Finch took in needlework that winter. My lady allowed a few shillings a week, sent through the butler, who could not resist a regretful allusion to the money wasted on the premium, and the cottage door was kept as jealously closed as hitherto. Martha Finch wanted no help, still less did she want sympathy. She shut herself in with her dying girl, and mother and child were once more all in all to each other, as in the days of Lizzie's childhood, before she dreamt of a genteel business, or developed that taste for bonnet-trimming.

At the turn of the year, when the days began to lengthen, and later when warm, mild weather came, so that the door was often set open in order that Lizzie might look out upon the little garden, though everyone else recognised the fact that, as far as neighbourly visits were concerned, the door was metaphorically closed, still Rosie could not be brought to recognise it at all. She was for ever slipping in and out, now with the first primroses found in the hill wood, now to exhibit her Sunday School prize, now simply to ask how Lizzie did, and whether she was not a little better yet. Although for some reason or other, possibly because of the blooming health that offered such a contrast to the looks of her own daughter, Mrs. Finch seemed almost to hate the sight of Rosie, after Lizzie's faint "Let her be, mother; I like to have her come," no further objection was made. The child was not allowed to stay, however; only for a passing moment now and then did the little face brighten the tiny room that held within its four walls such an infinity of pain.

With who knows what vain regrets over the idle girlhood slipping so fast away, Lizzie would murmur from time to time that she wished she had been of more use, of as much use as Rosie even, and would lie with a cold tear or two trickling down her cheek. If at such times Martha Finch blamed herself for the manner in which she had brought up her girl, she never said so, but soothed her tenderly, and kept her own regrets to herself.

In those days the Vicar ministered faithfully to the dying girl, and to the mother, who needed his ministrations fully as much.

Lizzie was patient and gentle. The self-complacency that had been her chief characteristic was all gone now; the weak spirit gathered strength to face the coming change, and lingering illness aught lessons her mother's blind affection would fain have spared. But on Martha Finch herself the Vicar's words of counsel or of consolation had no effect. He did not like to think of how the blow would be borne when it should fall at last.

At Easter the last parting came. In the low-lying meadows near the church the lambs were at play, and flowers bloomed everywhere when Lizzie was carried to the churchyard, but Mrs. Finch hardly seemed to see the blossoms strewn by the children over the new-made grave. She walked home in silence from the funeral she had attended with dry eyes, only turning at her own gate to thank those who had gone with her; and then entering alone the desolate room, where she shut herself in with her grief as she had done with her respectability. Through the bright days of early summer, and the longer warmer ones of harvest-time alike, she sat alone and sewed, or dreamt over the past,—the short past of her child's life,—for had any been there to see, they might have noticed that for hours the work lay neglected on her lap, and her dull dry eyes were fixed upon the cushioned chair in which Lizzie had passed so many weary days. The poor rarely take to their beds until the very last, and Lizzie had been in that lower room twenty-four hours preceding her death.

From the small quantity of work taken in, the scanty pay it brought might have been calculated without much difficulty, so that it might not have been difficult either to guess how the time passed in the cottage, the threshold of which its mistress rarely crossed, or what poor food was partaken of by the mother whose heart was slowly breaking within its walls. But it was no one's business to interfere in the affairs of Mrs. Finch, who had always kept her neighbours at a distance, and had given no sign that even now she wished them to draw nearer. She did not so much as ask who placed the flowers on Lizzie's grave that were seen there every Sunday; and when, from having once seen Rosie in the act of replacing the faded blossoms by fresh ones, she must have known to whom she owed this tribute to the memory of her dead child, Martha Finch had not so much as a word of thanks for the kind-hearted little maid. Therefore, her neighbours stood

aloof, where for all Lizzie's life, her mother had bid them stand, though the women looked after her pitifully as she went "up

"Her dull eyes were fixed upon the cushioned chair in which Lizzie had passed so many weary days."

street" to the shop, appearing each time more gaunt and thin, and with that dull stare in her eyes which it was not good to see. Mothers kept their children out of her way upon such occasions.

"It will, may-be, hurt her for to come across them, and she with her one chick under the sod," they said.

Even Rosie was bidden to let her go by without speaking.

As the harvest drew to a close, and it was nearly time for school to open once again, our Rosie had cares of her own.

Day after day through all the holidays she might have been seen marshalling her flock of white-headed boys and toddling girls under the hedge of the cornfield just opposite her father's door; and, as Rosie observed, whatever would become of her children when she had to go back to school herself? It promised to be a fine autumn, and there would be weeks yet before cold weather drove the little ones to the safer shelter of their own homes. As long as it was possible to turn them out to play, the mothers were certain to continue doing so.

One afternoon, when really the future of her self-constituted charges began to weigh very heavily upon the mind of Rosie, the Vicar and the lady from the Hall walked up the road together. At the gate of the cornfield they paused.

"Why, what a flock our Rosie has got together here!" the lady said.

"When I'm back at school they'll get tumbling about in the dust, making themselves not fit to be seen, and learning bad ways!" exclaimed Rosie; "and they're *that* good with me as you wouldn't believe without you was to see 'em."

"I can easily believe it," the Vicar said, smiling at the earnest little maid.

"What do you do with them?" asked the lady.

"Oh, we play! We keep school, too, sometimes. They know their letters, most all of 'em, and Moses he've learnt a hymn. Come along, Moses, and speak your piece to the lady."

"The mothers of these little ones are a careless set, I fear," the Vicar observed, after the piece, with much prompting from the teacher, had been duly spoken; "it would be a great thing if the little ones could be kept together, and taught their letters till they are big enough to go to school. I must see about it."

"Rosie *has* seen about it," laughed his companion; "a little hedge-schoolmistress! But is there really no one but this child to do this work?"

The friends passed on talking the matter over as they went,

and leaving Rosie standing in the sunshine and full of thought, for she had heard and understood. *Was* there no one else to keep the little ones together, and teach them their letters as the Vicar suggested? As the question passed through her mind, her eyes fell upon the low door next her own. The sight of that door at that particular moment must have suggested the plan that at once presented itself to Rosie, and which certainly was a plan that would have presented itself to no other person in the place, for on a sudden impulse she crossed the road, and Martha Finch, disturbed within her solitary room by the sound of a hand upon the latch, called out sharply to know who was there.

"It be only me," said Rosie, full of the idea that possessed her just then, and entering boldly. "Oh, please, Mis' Finch, will you let my children come here for to be out of harm's way, and learn their letters? Come Monday week school opens, and I can't see to 'em no more myself. There's only Betsey Ann as is big enough to go along of me down the steep hill to the school house; I can mind her same as though she was my little sister, but then there's all the rest of 'em—and, oh! don't it look as if Lizzie was here still? I miss her ever so much, I do!"

Rosie's voice had begun to falter, and her looks to stray round the small room, long before her speech came to an end.

The child had not crossed the threshold since Lizzie's death, and now the sight of the chair, the books upon the shelf, the mirror before which the young girl used to try on her bits of finery, the sight of the mother sitting there alone, seemed to wring her heart; for, lifting a corner of her pinafore to her eyes, Rosie sobbed aloud.

Martha Finch looked for a moment at the child as she stood in the open doorway, the sunshine beating on the white, dusty road beyond.

"What brought you here? Why do you dare to come in here?"

"Along of the children," repeated Rosie, drawing nearer, so that only the little work-table separated the two; "you don't go out no more, but sit home all day,—and wouldn't they be company for you when you're so sad for Lizzie, and keep missing of her all day long? They're very lovin', particular Moses; you wouldn't believe what a one for lovin' and kissin' Moses be."

The little earnest tear-stained face was near the widow now, as though Rosie herself would have loved and kissed her had she dared.

The woman pointed angrily to the door.

"Your children! Is the world coming to an end that you run in and out and chatter your nonsense to *me?* How dare you do it?"

"I miss Lizzie ever so much," sobbed the child, laying a small hand upon the empty chair; "the little 'uns ain't got no one to see to 'em, and you be all alone."

She seemed puzzled. Having come there in the first instance for the sake of her children only, it almost appeared that she stayed there for the sake of the desolate mother herself, and that her only object was to persuade Martha Finch to take comfort in the loving ways of those little ones whose cause Rosie pleaded with so much earnestness.

Her words had no effect, or seemed to have none.

"Go, child, and think twice before you have the ill manners to come where you are not wanted!" Mrs. Finch said, sternly. If her thin hand trembled as it used not to do, and if there was a look of dumb pain in her eyes that never had been there while Lizzie lived, Martha Finch was still as formidably respectable as she always had been, and there was nothing for it but to obey her mandate.

Repeating once more that she did miss "Lizzie ever so much," and wiping her eyes still, Rosie turned reluctantly away, and in another moment the sunshine and the sweet tearful face were shut out together.

It was strange that Mrs. Finch, who had shown so much displeasure at this unexpected visit, should rise and, stepping to the window, watch Rosie as she crossed the road to where her children were clustering about the gate—watch how she coaxed one, seemed to be chiding another, and was occupied in that motherly way of hers with each of them in turn. Perhaps the weak, complaining voice of Lizzie sounded in the ears of her mother as she looked on at the little scene. "I've been no good to no one; never so much good as Rosie, even." Or perhaps the first spoken words of sympathy that had broken the chill silence of the room, the first tears shed there for the dead girl had touched the heart of the bereaved mother, for she took up the habit of watching

Rosie from the window, on the sill of which the geranium plants, once tended with pride and care, were now all dead and withered, —watching the children of happier mothers, and thinking of the lonely grave where a child's hands strewed flowers week by week, and turning, with dry eyes still, to see the empty chair opposite her own.

Nearly a fortnight went by thus, and when the Monday came on which school re-opened it was with the first faint feeling of interest in anything but the one sad subject that occupied her thoughts through the lonely days and the long sleepless nights that Martha Finch glanced furtively from between the withered geraniums to see what arrangements Rosie after all had contrived to make for her little friends, or what they would do that day when Rosie went by, her bag of books upon her arm, and left them to themselves.

Rosie never went by at all.

Nine o'clock came and went. Many a little scholar had gone down the road; groups of two or three together, laggards sauntering by themselves, "ten o'clock scholars" racing past in the vain endeavour to overtake lost time, and with the certain prospect of pains and penalties to come—but no Rosie. There were the white-headed children at play together in the dust, and there amongst them was Betsey Ann, who should by rights have been making her way, clinging to Rosie's hand, down the steep school-house hill. Martha Finch could not settle to her work until the morning was far advanced, and when she did sit down at last to the small round table she actually moved the flower-pots upon one side that she might from her accustomed seat keep watch upon the children still.

Dinner hour arrived in due course; those rough boys of Bennet's and Bennet himself turned in next-door, and by-and-by turned out again to work. The dusty children were fetched home one by one, and dragged past crying lustily, and were before long turned out once more to play or quarrel in the road. And still no sign of Rosie. What could have happened to the child? As evening drew on, Martha Finch wondered she should think so often of the little figure that had stood in her own door-way lately, wondered she should seem to hear the childish sobs, and not be able to forget how she had driven away the tear-stained little face, and how the

room had been duller ever since. That night there was something else to think of as she lay awake than her lost Lizzie, and when she fell asleep it was to dream of a child weeping by her side.

Lizzie wept no more; she was happy and at rest, and the tears Rosie shed Lizzie's mother could have wiped away had she so chosen. Perhaps the dawning of this thought, half-formed and vague though it was, brought the first ray of light to a darkened spirit. For the first time Martha Finch felt that Lizzie was not really *there*, in the dread, silent grave, from whence she never would come home, call to her as her mother might, and where no sound of loving voice could reach her. For the first time the room did not seem so empty, and itself so like a grave; but, as Rosie had exclaimed, almost as though Lizzie were in it still, or had gone but a little way and would be back before very long.

If "climbing sorrow" made its presence felt again, and the old cry echoed in the mother's heart, "I shall go to her, she will not return to me," it was the first time that note of hope and resignation had been feebly touched, for no resignation had hitherto mingled with her grief at all.

Through that day, as through the preceding one, the lonely woman watched for Rosie, and Rosie never passed. Towards evening the parish doctor entered the Bennets' cottage. The sight recalled to Martha Finch how often he had passed and repassed her own threshold while Lizzie's life was slowly ebbing beyond the reach of human skill. It was no wonder she should hate the sight of him, she thought. But this spasm of sudden pain at the fancy of Rosie in her turn ill—perhaps in danger—*that* was wonderful, unaccountable, Mrs. Finch told herself impatiently. And yet she stood at the window until the doctor had gone again, and was standing there still when Mrs. Bennet, with a basket on her arm, stepped out, probably to do some errand that in the ordinary course of things would have been entrusted to her little girl. This confirmation of her fears so far moved Mrs. Finch, that she set open her door intending to watch for her neighbour's return, and with the half-formed resolution of inquiring whether anything serious was the matter.

And now, to a fanciful imagination, it might seem that a wonder came to pass, that a spell was broken, and that through this voluntary opening of the long-closed door, type of the closed heart,

some neighbourly feelings and kindly charities of life came in with the sweet evening air, growing a little chill and autumnal, with the voices of Rosie's children at their play, with the clear pale colours of the evening sky neighbourly feelings, kindly charities, against which Martha Finch had barred her house and her heart alike for many years. Certain it is that, Mrs. Bennet being long in coming, her next-door neighbour was seen to move with hesitating step down her own slip of garden and turn in at the Bennets' white gate.

The house door was ajar; there was no one in the room below, and everything was perfectly silent; the boys and their father would not be in for an hour yet. Advancing to the foot of the narrow stair, Mrs. Finch called the child's name, even then pronouncing it in her sternest tone—one more calculated to give the impression that she had come to complain of Rosie than to ask what ailed her.

The child's voice answered her at once.

"Who be it? Mother's stepped out, and I'm alone up here."

Finding there was no answer—for Martha Finch, reassured by the tones of the clear childish voice, had half a mind to go away again—Rosie called entreatingly to whoever it was to come up the stairs.

"I can't come down, you know. *Do'ee* now come up and sit a bit."

That "*do'ee* now," in Rosie's coaxing tones, was hard to resist for anyone, though certainly its effect had never been tried on Mrs. Finch before. Not that Rosie knew in the least whom she was addressing at the present moment; it mattered so little who it was; some one come to see her, one of her friends, for Rosie had no enemies; that was quite enough for the friendly little soul.

Almost inclined to yield, and indeed in the act of setting her foot upon the lowest stair, Mrs. Finch was startled by the return of Rosie's mother.

"Well, I'm beat!" exclaimed the worthy woman. "It's never *you*, Mis' Finch? I take it kind, I'm sure; and won't you step up and see the child? It's a bit of bad luck, and no mistake! but then our Rosie ain't had no bad luck in all her life till now, and we must take trouble in its turn, though it do seem hard for the child to have broke her leg like this."

They were in the upper room by now, for Mrs. Finch had found it awkward to back in the narrow entry, and altogether more dignified to walk straight upstairs since she *had* come, and with Mrs. Bennet talking so fast behind her. Rosie, lying on her little bed, was not half so surprised when she recognised her visitor as her mother had been. To Rosie it seemed so natural that any one, even "Mis' Finch," should be kind. The little girl held out her arms and pulled Martha Finch down to kiss her, at which the astonishment of Mrs. Bennet was comically depicted upon her round, good-humoured face.

"Didn't you hear me cry out?" Rosie said. "Mammy says I screeched terrible; but the doctor he up and called me a good little maid. It's a bad pain to break your leg. Did *you* ever do it, Mis' Finch? And me that was to have gone to school that there very day. I'll lose my marks, you know; that *do* come hard 'cause it ain't my fault. I'd go if I could."

The child talked on, in the fullest assurance that her visitor sympathised with her and liked to hear all there was to tell, but Mrs. Bennet's unconcealed surprise at this event—an event that had never occurred before—was so mortifying to her neighbour that she very soon took her leave, and, pursued all the way by the friendly speeches of Rosie's mother, returned to her own abode.

"Do'ee now come again," had been the child's last words; but Martha Finch did not go. The autumn days succeeded one another; a cold rain fell slanting across the landscape. Rosie's children got wet through as they tumbled about in the muddy road, splashing themselves in the puddles, and quarrelling worse than ever; and in due course of time the little maid was carried downstairs and settled comfortably near the window, where she could at least look out upon the garden and see who passed. It was from this window that the smiling little face—a trifle pale from pain and long imprisonment within the house—began to greet Martha Finch as she went "up street" to the shop, or to carry home the needlework by which alone she earned her living; for since her bereavement she had shrunk from returning to field-work, which would have entailed at least some intercourse, however limited, with those about her.

It was impossible not to return a nod, even a grim smile now and then, when Rosie seemed so certain of the acknowledgment of

her friendly signals; when she took to beckoning in an entreating manner it was impossible not to step in for a moment, especially as Rosie was tolerably sure to be alone at such times; for, when any of her frequent visitors were with her, she was too much occupied to see Mrs. Finch go by.

Insensibly Martha Finch grew fond of this child, and one day when they were alone together, surprised at a very unusual pettishness of manner, as though something worried or vexed the little creature, generally so placid and so cheery, Martha Finch asked what was the matter now.

"It's along of my children," said Rosie, screwing up her face into a puzzled frown. "Mammy won't let 'em come in here and make a work for her to clean up, and they do be getting all their bad ways again."

She raised herself upon her couch in order to obtain a better view of this small flock once more so neglected, and pressed a round, soft cheek against the lattice pane.

"Could one of your brothers go round and let the mothers know that if they choose to send the children to me for two hours in the morning and for two hours in the afternoon, I will take them in, Rose Bennet?" demanded Martha Finch, in her shortest and driest tone.

Had the neglected state of the little ones touched her? Had the anxiety of Rosie touched her? Or did she only see here a way of adding to her scanty earnings—a way that would not force her to cross her own threshold or to "neighbour" with others more than she had ever done?

Rosie's large eyes met those of the visitor, and stared at her in unbounded amazement.

"Why, them's same as school hours!"

"Of course: and there would be the same money to pay—the twopence they would have to give down yonder."

For a moment the bewildered expression lingered on Rosie's face; then it was succeeded by a flash of purest pleasure.

"You're going to keep school for 'em! Well! you do be a good kind woman!"

The little arms were thrown about Martha Finch with the gesture she was fast growing used to now, and for days after that it was a sight to see how important was the little maid, with what

an air she gave instructions to her youngest brother and sent him backwards and forwards on her messages, with what triumph and delight she heard of the assent of first one and then another neighbour to this new scheme which had its origin in her loving heart, and but for the magic power of her childish sympathy would never have started into life at all.

The Vicar could hardly believe his eyes when two low forms made their appearance in the room that, to tell the truth, was scarcely large enough to accommodate the scholars the zeal of our Rosie had collected, or his ears, when Martha Finch remarked with the utmost coolness that the children were sadly neglected, it was shocking to hear the language they used, and she had thought it might be convenient to the mothers to send them to her, while the trifle paid for them would be convenient to herself, provided that the Vicar saw no objection to the plan.

Of course he saw none, or forbore to mention it if he did, for the Vicar lives in daily terror of what the sanitary inspectors may say of Martha Finch's school, where there cannot be, by any means, the orthodox amount of cubic feet of air for so many pair of lungs. It does not so much matter in summer, when the back door is open always, and beyond the scullery there is a peep of low swelling hills and a nearer one of green trees and pleasant meadows, while the fresh air pours in unimpeded. But it is another thing in winter, when doors are shut; and yet the children, in absolute defiance of sanitary laws, persist in keeping well and rosy. There has been no sickness amongst them yet.

Meantime strangers are apt to remark that the mistress of this roadside infants' school is one of the sternest and most forbidding-looking women it ever was their lot to meet. The children are not afraid of her, however. They hang about the low white gate long before she opens it to admit them to the strip of garden—gay once more with bachelors' buttons and neat with box edging; and when they enter they do so clinging to her skirts, looking up into her face, and prattling to her fearlessly. There is no startling change in her demeanour; she is a consistent woman, and neighbours almost as little with other women as before. Perhaps the change is deeper, for she will stand sometimes for a quarter of an hour talking seriously with Mr. Bennet across the fence. Rosie is her right hand in the business of the little school, and may run in

and out as she will, and happy mothers of living girls are beginning to find out that if they need help or sympathy they may ask both and be sure to find both from Martha Finch. Her appearance is as respectable as ever; she holds her head high, and in great measure keeps herself to herself still; but the heart-broken look has gone out of her eyes, and the touch of little hands has helped to heal the sore heart of this childless mother.

"No denying it do work well," Mrs. Bennet will sometimes say, "but there's no one only our Rosie as would have thought of such a thing as naming of it to Mis' Finch—her as we thought like to die of grief for her only child; it do beat me to see her a'most brought back to life as one may say by other folks' children. Mis' Finch indeed! Our Rosie she don't never see no difference in folks."

Our Rosie is quite unconscious of having done good; she has already forgotten the next-door scholars were ever "her children," and goes blithely on her way, "a very harmless child," and a favourite with all.

THE DREAM OF THE BOY WHO GREW TIRED OF BEING STRONG.

I.

"WELL, this is a strong one, at any rate." That was the first thing they said of him when he came into the world. They felt him all over, and nodded their heads approvingly. He was well made, and as red as the comb of a turkey-cock.

"No mistake about *him*," said the father, when he came home from his work at night, and was made to look at the little fellow who had arrived since the morning. "We've had luck this time, mother, and you need not fret any more about the other boy. The strong one will pull the weak one through, and all will be right in the end."

The mother smiled proudly; it was a good day that had brought her this fine healthy boy. She did not know how to be thankful enough that he was not like the other little one, who had been a daily trouble ever since he came to her.

That was a boy too; but it was so small and delicate that strangers always took it for a girl. Its poor little body was crooked; it ailed almost always; it had one leg shorter than the other; it could not walk yet, though it was nearly three years old. The father used to take it on his knees, and look at it sadly; and, though he did not plainly say so, the mother knew he was thinking that the child would never be much of a man—never such a tall stout son as he would want to help him in his work when he himself grew weak with age. Her heart ached for his disappointment, and she often cried bitter tears as she rocked the sickly boy in his cradle. But now she need not cry any more, for she had got a strong son, of whom the father was glad.

She felt proud and happy. Not that she meant to love the strong boy best. She said to herself that he should belong to the father

—the weak one should be her pet, because he wanted her most, and because others would think less of him.

They called the strong boy Robur. He grew fast, and every day the father was more pleased with him. I don't know how many times a day he did not repeat to his wife, or to some neighbour, or to himself when there was no one else to speak to, that "this was a strong one, and no mistake." He liked to hear him cry, because he roared so lustily, whereas the other had only lungs enough for a weak little whine; he liked to have him undressed, that he might feel his straight legs and arms; he liked to put him in the tub and see him beat out bravely against the water. And when he began to crawl about and upset things the father never minded what mischief he did; he was welcome to break everything in the house in showing how strong and healthy he was. As for the mother, she sometimes shrugged her shoulders and grumbled a little, saying that the strong boy gave her more trouble than the weak one. But at heart she was as proud of him as the father was; and she never missed an opportunity of showing him off to the good wives of the neighbourhood, not one of whom could boast of so fine a child as hers.

Robur could walk when he was ten months old; he could speak before he was two years. The father used to make him stand on his knee, and strike out first one arm and then the other, and kick out his legs and jump high while he held his hands. Then he would say, "Robur is a fine strong boy;" and Robur used to say after him, "'Obur fine strong boy."

Those were almost the first words he learned. He was very proud of being able to say them, and used to repeat them a hundred times a day. But it was some time before he understood what they meant.

One day he was running along, shouting at the top of his voice, "'Obur fine strong boy, 'Obur fine strong boy," when he ran against a big boy, and tumbled down and hurt himself.

He began to cry. The big boy picked him up and laughed. At this he was very angry, and cried more.

"Fine strong boys should not cry," said the other.

Robur stared, and stopped crying.

"Only weak little girls cry."

Robur stared, and began to cry again. "It hurts," he said, and he rubbed his knee, which he had grazed in falling.

"Strong boys don't mind being hurt."

"'Obur minds."

"Then Robur is not a strong boy."

And so saying, the big boy went on, leaving Robur much puzzled.

All the rest of that day he never once said "'Obur fine strong boy." He was afraid that if he did he should instantly tumble down again and hurt himself and be scolded for crying. Till bed-time came, and then when the father took him up and made him strike out and kick and jump, and ended by saying, "Robur is a fine strong boy," Robur repeated the words after him as usual, and having done so, he asked, "What's strong?"

The father laughed.

"What's strong, my boy? Why, fat legs are strong, and fat arms are strong, and straight back and curly hair. Robur is strong, and father is strong. What on earth set you asking that, I wonder?"

"'Obur is strong," said the boy again. And the father tossed him high in the air and shouted, "Ay, ay, Robur's a strong lad, and no mistake!"

Some time afterwards Robur asked another question.

"What's the use of being strong?" he said one evening, as he sat by the fireside on his father's knee.

The crippled brother sat opposite, nestled against the mother's gown. She was teaching him to knit, and he was getting on cleverly. Robur tried to knit, too; he always tried to do whatever his brother did. But he could not manage the pins; they got mixed up, and the wool got knotted, and the stitches tumbled off. So Robur gave up knitting in a pet. He did not like being beaten by his brother who was weak; he saw no use in being strong if he could not do things. That was why he asked in the evening, "What's the use of being strong?"

Besides the father and the mother and the two boys, there was a stranger in the cottage that evening, a brother workman of the father's, who had come in to supper—a tall dark man, who was counted the strongest and handiest workman of the neighbourhood. He was a woodcutter, like Robur's father and all the men

about. It was he who answered Robur's question. His black eyes flashed, and he tossed his thick hair like a lion's mane, and threw up his big arms, and spoke in a loud voice—

"What's the use of being strong, my boy? Why there's every use in being strong—no use in being anything else. It's the strong fellows who do most work and get most wages. It's the strong fellows who get all the fun in life, and everything that's worth having. They knock the weak ones down, and get their own way in the world,—and quite right, too, for it's for them the world is made. What say you, neighbour?" And he looked across to Robur's father.

"No doubt of it, no doubt of it," answered the father. "The strong win, and the weak go to the wall. That's been the way of the world all along, and it's not likely to be changed yet awhile."

"No, nor *any* while, as far as I can see," said the other. "It's a fine thing to be strong, as I say many a time to my old woman. If *I* hadn't been strong, I should like to know how we should ever have got along. But, as it is, we've as good a house as any in the country—and better, too. And I built it myself, and cut every plank of it, and carried it home after work, and set it up, and knocked every nail in with my own hands, when I was a strip of a lad and might have been starving on boy's wages, if I had not been as strong as most men double my age. Oh, it's a fine thing to be strong, my boy, as you'll find out by-and-by. You just go on as you've begun, and you'll not have any need to ask what's the use of being strong. You'll be able to thrash every boy in the place, and you'll have all the pretty girls wanting to marry you. You see, if I'm not right."

"Tchut, tchut, neighbour!" said the mother; "don't be filling the lad's head with such nonsense. What does he want to be thrashing other lads for, or thinking of pretty girls? Better be a good boy like his brother than ever so strong. That's what *I* say;" and the mother stroked the little crippled boy's hair and trotted off to get supper ready.

Robur thought a great deal about what the neighbour said, and soon afterwards he had an opportunity of proving that a part of it at any rate was true. He had a quarrel with another boy. It was about what game they should play in the play-ground at school. Robur wanted prisoners' base, the other wanted duck-

stone. The rest of the school were divided. Some were on Robur's side, some were against him. Neither Robur nor the other boy would give in. They got very angry, and at last they fought. Robur was the younger by a year and a half, but he was a good head taller, and his arms were bigger round. He knocked the other boy down, and all the school shouted, "Well done!" and they played prisoners' base every day for weeks afterwards.

"When one is strong, one can get one's own way in the world," said Robur to himself, and it seemed to him that after that fight he grew faster than ever—in fact, that he would be a man in no time.

II.

He thought he really had become a man one morning when the father said—

"I'll tell you what, mother, after to-day that boy can't go to school any more. He's strong enough now to walk to and from the clearing, and I want him to help me at my work. There's many an odd job a strong lad like that can do in the day, and the sooner he begins the better chance he has of making a good workman by-and-by. So mind, to-day's his last day at school."

And so it was.

Robur woke next morning with the first twitter of the birds, and jumped out of bed and ran to the window to see what time it was by the sun. But the sun was still hidden behind the great pine-forest in which his father worked, and Robur knew that it would not be time to start for the clearing till it had mounted above the trees and was shedding a flood of white light upon their crests. For it was full summer time, when the nights are short and the dawn comes long before one need get up. So Robur went back to bed.

But he could not go to sleep again. He lay awake thinking of the wonderful day before him: how he was to go to the clearing of which he had heard his father speak so often, and see the tall trees bound round with ropes and sawn across till they came crashing down upon the underwood, while all the men shouted for joy. As he lay in bed, it all came before him clearly like a picture: and when he thought of the moment of the tree falling, he seemed

really to hear the crash, and forgetting where he was, he started up and shouted "Hurrah!" with all his might; at which his brother, who slept in the same bed with him, woke up in a fright and asked what the noise was about. Robur laughed and told how he had been thinking of the great trees coming down, and how glorious it had seemed when the tree fell, crushing the shrubs and saplings under its weight, and making the twigs and splinters fly like a cloud of dust. But his brother said he did not like to think of the great trees being cut down after they had taken so many years to grow, and that he thought it a pity they should crush the pretty underwood. He always looked at things differently from Robur. Once the father had brought him home a nest of young jackdaws that had been found in the branches of a felled tree. The nest had been so snugly fitted in between the twigs that when it was taken out all the fledglings were safe. Only the mother had flown away, and did not know how to find her brood again. The cripple boy reared the orphan birds tenderly, and they thrived under his care. They grew up quite tame, and used to eat out of his hand.

Robur did not care about the jackdaws, and he wondered that his brother should be fond of them. He supposed it was because he was weak himself that he cared for weak things, just as he, Robur, being strong, liked strong things. No doubt, it was all right, as the mother often said it was. Only Robur was heartily glad that he was strong himself, and could go to work with his father instead of playing with jackdaws.

Robur did not find his first day's work quite as pleasant as he had thought he should. The five miles to the clearing seemed to him very long. He thought they must have walked ten miles at least; and when at last they came out on the open ground, he was so tired that he would have liked to lie down and sleep, only he was afraid the men would laugh at him. He did his best to keep awake, and he stood about watching the men, very proud whenever any of them called to him to hand a tool or hold a rope. He got pretty bravely through the morning, but right glad he was when twelve o'clock came and they all stopped work and sat down on the ground to eat their dinner. Robur had his dinner wrapped in a red handkerchief, just like the others, and as he sat in a ring with them, eating great hunks of bread and cheese, he felt as much

a man as any of them. He was a favourite with them all, and they petted him and made much of him.

"Robur going to work with his father."

"Let's drink to the young one's health," said the man, with the black eyebrows.

"Ay," said another, "to the young one's health, and may he soon be a strong man like his father."

"And as good a workman."

"And as jolly a fellow."

"Ay, ay," said they all. "Here's to your health, young one, and may you grow to be a strong man and good workman, and a jolly fellow all round."

And they handed round the beer-can and drank each a good draught to Robur's health. Then they made Robur himself drink, and give three cheers for the great pine trees. And Robur cheered heartily, and they all laughed and patted him on the back. He was quite happy now: dinner had made him feel strong again. He forgot the long five-mile walk in the morning, and thought it was very jolly to be a woodcutter and dine in the open air with the blue sky overhead and the pleasant scent of the pine trees all about him.

The men sat chatting on after their dinner, and at first he listened to their talk, but by-and-by it seemed to get confused, and Robur's head began to nod up and down, so that he thought it would be more comfortable to stretch himself flat out on the ground.

He did so, and in a few moments he was fast asleep and dreaming. . . . He and his brother were playing in the garden at home. There was a tall pine tree growing up above the house, tall—so tall that its top seemed to touch the sun; and high up in its branches was a nest of jackdaws. His brother said he should like them to play with, so Robur climbed up after them. The stem was tough and the branches were far apart, so that he had to make great strides to get from one to another. But it was quite easy to him, for he was as tall as a giant, and he felt strong and active. He went from branch to branch, shouting hurrah at everything, while the little brother down below looked up and wondered. He came to the top and took the birds' nest in his hand, and was just looking round to nod to his brother and say, "All right, I have them," when he felt the tree totter, and the nest tumbled out of his hand, and in a moment down came the tree and he in it with a great bump and a crash, while his brother laughed and clapped his hands, and shouted "Hurrah!"

Robur started up in a passion, and cried, "How dare you laugh because I fall—you——"

But there was no brother near, and no jackdaws, and he had never been up a tree at all. He had only been dreaming, for he had fallen asleep after dinner, and the noise that awakened him was the fall of a great tree a hundred yards off, at which the men had been working all the afternoon while Robur slept.

Oh! how his legs ached, and how long the way seemed as he trudged home by his father's side in the evening. He was half-asleep by the time they reached the cottage, and he could hardly wake up enough to eat his supper. His brother wanted to hear all about his day; but he could not tell him anything for yawning, and very soon the mother took him in her arms and carried him off to bed.

He did not wake early next morning; he was still asleep when his mother came to the bedside to say that if he did not get up at once he would be too late to go to the clearing. He wished he could be too late: he was just going to ask if he might not stay at home that day and rest; but then he thought how all the boys at school would laugh if they heard that one day's work had tired him out, for Robur boasted a great deal of his strength among his school fellows, and many of them were jealous of him, and inclined to think it a very good joke when anything happened to show that he was not quite as strong as he thought himself. And Robur did not like being laughed at. So he jumped out of bed quickly, swallowed down his breakfast, and was ready to start with his father. He managed to keep awake that day, and was not quite so tired when he came home in the evening. But the next day he was more tired than ever; and by the time Sunday came he thought he should have died of leg-ache if he had not had a day of rest.

His mother pitied him, and said he was too young; but his father only laughed, and said, "Beginning was always disagreeable, and so it was best to begin early and get it over soon. Robur would get used to work in a very little while, or he was not the *man* his father had taken him for."

The father said *man* quite gravely, and that made up to Robur for his aching legs. He held his head very high, and seeing his brother playing with the jackdaws in the garden, said to him that he wondered how much longer he would go on caring for such babyish things. It seemed to him at that moment that *he* liked nothing in the world except work.

III.

It was as the father said. Robur very soon got accustomed to the long walks, and ceased to be much tired by them. But he did not cease to be glad when Sunday came round, and he could feel as he woke in the morning: "To-day I need not go to the clearing. I may stay at home and play."

For though he went on thinking himself a man, he had found out that he still cared for a great many things besides work. He liked birds'-nesting, and marbles, and leap-frog. And he liked running races better than anything else because he could run faster than any other boy in the place, and so he always won.

He liked all these things so much that he got a notion into his head that when he really was a man, and could have everything his own way (as the strong people do), he would only work one day a week, and play six—instead of working six and playing one. He did not say anything about this notion to anyone. He thought people would most likely say it was nonsense, as he saw that none of the people about him had thought of trying it. But that need make no difference to him. When he was a man he was going to have his own way because he was so strong, and that was the way he meant to choose. He was very fond of thinking of all the things he should do when he was a man—of the wonderful house he would build himself—larger and more comfortable than the one he lived in now; of the horse he would keep to take him backwards and forwards to the clearing; of the pigs, and the chickens, and the turkeys that he would rear; of the wonderful far-off countries he would go and see. He used to think of all these things continually. He thought of them in the morning as he went to his work, and they seemed quite near and easy to manage. He thought of them again as he came home in the evening, and then they seemed farther off, and he did not always feel quite sure that they would ever be possible at all.

Time went by—days, and weeks, and months, and years. Robur was growing to be really a big boy, and learning to laugh at some of his childish dreams of what he should do when he was a man. He knew, for instance, that it was nonsense to think of playing six days and working one; he saw that if he meant to get on in the world he must work more than other people, and not less. But he

was as sure as ever that he would get on in the world, and have his own way, and get plenty of fun in life. Moreover, he was quite determined not to live always on the edge of the old pine-forest, cutting down trees all his life, as his father and his grandfather had done. He had heard of great countries far away where there were very few people and where strong men could get great wages; where there were miles and miles of forest in which anyone who chose might cut down the trees for his own use, and build a house and live in it like a king, shooting the wild animals round about for food, and doing what he liked with the land. He knew that soon he would be earning wages, which would be all his own to do what he liked with, and he said to himself that he would save up his money carefully till he had enough to take him to one of those grand new countries, and then he would say good-bye to his father and mother and the lame brother, and start away to make his fortune.

How he longed for that day to come!

IV.

It happened by-and-by that a little girl came to live at the cottage. Her father and mother, who were old neighbours of Robur's father and mother, had been overtaken in the middle of their life by great troubles. Poverty had come on them, and they had struggled against it hopelessly. Sickness had followed; and at last, worn out with sorrow, they had died within a few days one of the other, when their youngest child was hardly a year old. Friends were not wanting to help the orphan children. One or two were old enough to work; others were put to school. The little Amor wanted a mother, and it was Robur's mother who said she would take her and bring her up as though she were her own child. So she came to the cottage, and they all loved her.

The lame boy was her chief play-fellow. He watched her as she slept in her cradle, or crawled about the kitchen floor. He was wonderfully good and patient with her, and never wearied of contriving games for her amusement, and telling her stories of his own making. But he could not lift her in his arms and carry her out of doors. It was Robur who did that, on Sundays and when he came home from work in the evening. And it was Robur who

tossed her high over his head, as the father used to do with him, till she crowed with delight and cried if he offered to put her down, so that he had to do it over and over again till his arms ached, though they were so strong.

She was fond of the lame boy when Robur was away; but when Robur was there she would have no one to play with her but him.

Robur thought that when the time came for going away to make his fortune he would take Amor with him.

But while he was still dreaming of that wonderful time, a change came that sent it far away beyond all hope. One evening, as he and his father and the other workmen were coming home from the clearing, a sudden storm got up, and raged madly through the forest. The great trees shook like reeds, their branches struck together and rattled overhead. The men clung to one another, for the blast was so strong that singly they could not stand against it. Had they been in the open country they would have lain down till some of its force was spent, but it was not safe to linger in the forest. Every now and then, across the roar of the wind and the splash of the rain, came the sound of some great tree crashing to the ground. At any moment a tree might fall across their path—upon them. Robur knew that this happened sometimes, and his heart beat fast as he struggled on, clinging tightly to his father—no one speaking a word.

Suddenly all the separate noises of the storm were lost in one awful roar. The earth shook. Robur staggered and felt stunned. Then a groan sounded distinctly, and he knew what had happened. A large tree had fallen close by, and one of its branches had struck his father and laid him on the ground.

After that groan the stricken man made no sound. They could not tell whether he was dead or alive. They lifted him carefully and carried him through the wood—treading with difficulty—advancing slowly. The way that had been so hard before seemed almost impossible now that the task of carrying their burden was added to that of fighting against the storm. Robur and one other walked in front to force a clear path for the others to pass by.

At last they came to the hut. The mother was standing in the doorway shading a lamp with her hand, and looking out into the darkness to catch the first sight of her husband and son. She heard footsteps before she could see anything. "That is the boy's

step," she thought to herself; "but the father's—why don't I hear that? And those strange ones, why do *they* come?"

The steps stopped at the gate.

"Come in," cried the mother, "come in, and welcome. Why wait outside on such a night as this?"—as she strained her sight to see through the blackness.

Robur darted to her, but could not speak.

"The father, boy—where is the father?"

"Oh, mother, he is there. We have brought him——"

"Brought him!" shrieked the mother. "He is dead, then, as I guessed."

And she would have rushed to the gate, but Robur seized her and held her strongly back.

"Nay, mother, he is not dead," he said, "but he is badly hurt, and the neighbours have carried him home. Come into the house, mother, and make all ready. He will want help. Come in, mother, and be quiet."

Robur led his mother into the house, and she submitted to him as she was accustomed to submit to his father. All at once the boy seemed to have become a man. He spoke quietly and firmly; he looked grave, strong, sure. Little Amor, who had been waiting for him to come in and play with her, and had bounded out laughing at the first sound of his voice, fell back frightened at his pale, set face. She did not know what had happened; but she felt that he had more serious things to do to-night than to romp with a little girl. She crept into the corner and began to whimper, and the lame brother went to comfort her.

The mother clung to Robur.

They brought in the wounded man—for he was only wounded, not dead. Robur had been right without knowing it, and the word he had spoken to comfort his mother proved true. As they laid him down on the settle, he half-opened his eyes and groaned.

"Thank God!" said the mother, "it is as the boy said. He is badly hurt, but he is not dead."

Not dead, but so badly hurt that he lived only a few hours.

One of the brave men, who had carried him home went out again through the storm without staying for food or rest, to call a doctor from the nearest town. But before the doctor came the

father had passed away. He had lain speechless till a moment before he died. Then he opened his eyes and tried to sit up.

"Mother," he called, as if he thought the mother was far away. But she answered from close by, and he felt her hand in his.

"The boy is strong," he said, "and a good boy. He will be a good son to you and a good brother. And the little Amor—don't let her go; her father and I were friends as boys. Don't send her away—there will be enough—the boy is strong. He will be a stay to you."

Then he let her hand go, and his eyes closed, and after a few minutes Robur said, "Come away, mother—he is dead; you cannot help him any more."

V.

"THE boy is strong—he will be a stay to you." Over and over again, through the trouble of that sad winter time, these words came back to Robur, filling him, in spite of grief, with a new pride and joy in his strength.

He was strong, and they all leaned on him. The wages that he brought home were almost all that the family had to live on. It was, thanks to him, that the little Amor could stay with them, and not be turned adrift upon the world; it was, thanks to him, that the mother need not go out to work, as many of the mothers about did; it was, thanks to him, that the sum of money his father had put by to apprentice the lame brother to the basket-maker could be used for the purpose it was meant for.

They all leaned on Robur: they all knew that his strength was the support of their home. And Robur was so happy in feeling himself helpful that he forgot all his old dreams about saving money and going far away into a new country, where he could make a fortune and live like a king. It seemed to him now that he should never want anything more in his life than his mother's kiss when he threw his weekly wages into her lap, and his brother's silent thankfulness, and the little Amor's laughter when he played with her as of old on Sundays and in the evening times. All these things had come to him because he was so strong. What more could he want through all his life to make him happy?

So he thought for a time. But one day, as he walked home from the clearing, one of the men who had been working with him told him that he made up his mind to go away, and do just what Robur used to think of doing. The man had made clear plans, and was going to start at the end of the month. He had a friend out in the new country already, and he had letters from him describing all its glory. He took them from his pocket and read them to Robur; and, as Robur listened, the old longing came back upon him more strongly than ever—only not now as a pleasant dream that was one day to come true, but as a painful hunger that could not ever be satisfied. As the man put the letters back into his pocket, Robur said, with a sigh, "Oh, how I wish I could go with you!"

"Why not, old fellow?" said the other; "that's just what I want. It's dull going all by one's self, but two's company."

Robur shook his head sadly. "They want me at home," he said.

"Ah, true; you're the man of the house now, and can't be spared."

And no more was said about Robur going too.

Robur was very sad and silent that evening. Amor wanted him to play with her as usual, but he had not the heart to play. He put her away gently, saying, "Not to-night, little one:" and went out into the moonlight to be alone with his thoughts. His mother followed him out and laid her hand kindly on his shoulder, and asked what ailed him. But he did not answer. He could not tell her that his heart was filled with a wild longing to go away from her. Then she said, "Maybe, you are thinking of the father, boy?" And he felt ashamed, and kissed her, and came back into the house.

Oh, that longing to be gone! It grew and grew, until it seemed that all his life was turned to pain. His strength, of which he had once been so proud—fondly dreaming that it was to give him freedom and riches and pleasure—had turned into a cruel chain, of which the links were the loving words and looks of those at home. He shrank from their kisses, he answered their thanks roughly, he almost ceased to play with Amor. He grew sullen and harsh, and the mother used to watch him sadly, wondering what sorrow had come to him that her love could not reach with

comfort. "He is such a good son," she used to say to herself; "we should all be lost without him. And yet he is sad, and we cannot help him."

Yes, he was still a good son to the house. He worked as hard as ever, and brought home all his wages. But his work was weariness to him, and he seemed not to care what was doing in the house. All his thoughts were away in the far-off country where his friend was growing rich—where he might have been himself, but for the accident that had made him the bread-winner at home.

And they all loved him so; and were so patient with his moodiness—so gentle to him, in spite of his roughness. Their kindness filled him with shame, sometimes with a sort of anger. If only they would not love him, he used to say to himself, then he would care no more for their want and weakness. He would break away and forget them, and be happy in his own way. But their love held him, and he could not go.

One Sunday morning, in a fair spring-time, he was sitting on a bench outside the cottage. The fields were yellow with daffodils. Among the dark blue-green of the pine-forest a sprinkling of light green tassels told that the larches were budding. Swallows were twittering under the eaves. All was sunshine and stir and life. As Robur sat looking on the beauty, he felt the great longing more wildly than ever.

Within the cottage the mother was busy preparing the dinner. She was making a dish that used to be a favourite with Robur; but she hardly hoped that he would notice it, for now he never seemed to know when she had taken trouble to please him. As he sat outside, he heard her bustling to and fro; he heard his brother's voice telling a story to Amor; he heard Amor's laugh now and again at something that pleased her in the tale. They were all happy, he thought, and he alone was sad. Surely they would be able to do without him. They might have a hard time just at first. But the mother was a brave woman; she would go to work, and soon the brother would have served the time of his apprenticeship and would be getting wages; and long before that time Robur himself would be rich, and could send home money to them—more money than they had ever had before. He would go; he would not think it over any more, but he would make up his

mind now, on this bright Sunday morning, and end this pain that was breaking his heart.

He started from his seat with a feeling of new strength. It was to him as if he had been loosed from a long imprisonment. He could hardly keep himself from shouting aloud for gladness. He walked away from the cottage that he might rejoice without being seen.

Amor came running after him. He saw her, and quickened his pace. She called his name, and he pretended not to hear. Then she began to cry. He could not bear that; he turned and came to meet her. She put her arms round his neck, and laughed through her tears, asking him where he was going so fast.

"I was going away, Amor," he said, "right away, and I did not want you to stop me; but when you cried I thought I must take you with me; so I came back for you. Will you come with me, little one? Nay, you *must* come. For if I leave you behind I shall always think that you are crying, and that will break my heart. You will come with me, will you not?" And he lifted her in his arms without waiting for her to answer.

But he looked and spoke so strangely that Amor began to cry again.

"Do not cry," he said; "we are going to a beautiful country, where we shall grow rich and do as we like. Are you not glad to come with me?"

But Amor was frightened and only cried the more. "I do not want to go," she said. "I want to stay with the mother. Let me go back to the mother!"

Robur put her down sadly. "I must go alone, then," he said.

But Amor would not let him go. She took his big strong hand in her weak little one, and said, "Come back, too." And he let her lead him back into the house.

The mother chid him gently as he came in. Dinner was waiting; it would be cold; why had he not come in sooner?

He kissed her kindly, and she thought he looked less moody than he had done of late. And while she was thinking this, he praised the good dish she had prepared for him, and at that she said to herself that the son of old days had come back, and that his trouble had somehow passed away.

But she hoped too quickly.

From that day Robur ceased to say to himself that he would go; but he could not be happy in staying. Now that he had ceased to struggle against the chain that held him, he seemed to feel its weight more heavily than before. And the heart-sickness for which there was no cure spread to his body, and his very strength began to leave him. Work that had once been easy became a toil to him; he came home weary at night, and awoke unrested in the morning. His fellow-workmen wondered what had come to him; his mother wept out of sight, and thought, "God help us, he will die."

Amor watched him wistfully, wondering always where it was that he thought of going that Sunday morning, when he had spoken so strangely. To her he grew ever more and more gentle, but his gentleness had a sadness in it that she could not understand.

One day again he said to her, "Come away with me, Amor. I cannot go without you, and if I stay I shall die."

But she shook her head and answered, "I cannot leave the mother."

VI.

It was not only those at home who were accustomed to lean on Robur. All the neighbours counted on him for help. When he was quite a little boy he used to go errands out of school-time for all the mothers about, and as he grew older they learned to look to him when they were in any difficulty. He was as handy as he was strong, and he was always ready to do an odd job for a friend. It had been his pride to think that the neighbours could ill spare him. But latterly he had come to find his own work more than enough, and to dread being asked to do a kindness here and there; so much so that he had taken to going by a new cut to the clearing, on purpose to avoid passing through the village on his way to work, lest he should be waylaid by one or other of the neighbours and asked to do some service that would add to the day's weariness. For he knew that he could not refuse to do things when he was asked.

But on the morning when he had a second time asked Amor to go away with him and she had a second time said *no*, he left the house in such bitter sadness that he did not think which way he

was taking, and old habits led him through the village. A woman was standing at her gate, looking up and down the street with a puzzled face. When she saw Robur she called to him as if it were just for him that she had been looking. She had a long story to tell about how her son was ill, and she had nobody to send to the town with her work, which ought to be there that night, and how if it failed she would lose the money for it, and she could not spare it, for it was all she would have to keep house with that week, for her husband had spent his wages at the beershop, and distress was coming on her, and she did not know what to do unless Robur would help her by taking the things round for her after his work. Robur had done it for her often before; he could not refuse to do now. He took her bundle, and said, "All right, mother," and walked away up the street.

The town was six miles away, and it did not lie between his home and the clearing. The errand he had undertaken would about double the walk home. He would be half-dead at the end of it. But it could not be helped.

"Heigh-ho," he thought, "this is what comes of being strong."

When the day's work at the clearing was over Robur wished his comrades good-night, saying that he had to go round with the good woman's bundle. Upon which one of them said, "You don't look fit for it."

He did not feel fit for it; but at the man's word he roused himself and declared he was strong enough for anything.

"Take care," said the man, good-naturedly, "or you may get tired of being so strong. You're only a lad, after all, remember."

"All right," said Robur, "I'm as good a man as most of you."

And having made his boast, he struck off briskly, holding his head high—determined to look strong, whatever he might feel. But he could not bear up much longer. His legs ached, his back ached; the bundle, light as it was, seemed a heavy load. He felt weak, tired, ill. Suddenly he stopped and sank down on the ground. There was no one to see or hear him; he buried his face in his hands and groaned, "I think I *am* tired of being strong."

It was a lovely summer evening. In the wood where Robur had sunk down it was already twilight, but out in the open all was still bright with the colours of the setting sun. Here and there a stray sunbeam stole between the trees, and made red and purple

patches on the stems—among the ferns. A gentle breeze came blowing from the moorlands, sweet with the honey scent of the heath-flower. Leaves fluttered, insects murmured, the woods seemed breaking into music. Robur lifted up his head and looked round. The pleasant sights and sounds and scents came to him soothingly. They seemed to rest him.

But they bewildered him somehow. He felt as if he had ceased to be himself. He could not remember how he came there, whither he was going, what the bundle was that had rolled out of his hand and lay a few paces off. He stretched out an arm to take it; it was beyond his reach; to get up and go nearer seemed too much trouble; he let it lie. A sunbeam glanced across his eyes, dazzling them. He shut them lazily and lay down among the ferns.

* * * * *

Ferns!—The moment he found himself lying flat down among them they had ceased to be ferns; they were fairies—at least so he supposed they must be—for they were too small to be real people, and yet in everything but their size they were exactly like men and women—only far more beautiful than any men and women that Robur had ever seen before. The men, tiny as they were, carried themselves with quite a lordly air, and the ladies, with their long trains of green and gold, were so graceful that Robur thought he should never be tired of watching them as they glided about smiling and curtseying and talking low to one another in voices that were like the whisper of leaves in the evening time.

At first none of them seemed to notice him, but by-and-by a few came round him, and made signs to one another to look at the strange creature that had come among them.

Then one said, "He is asleep."

And another held up her finger in warning, and answered, "Do not wake him, he is so big that he might hurt us."

"He looks kind," said the one who had spoken first.

"And strong," said a third fairy, who had just come up, and who had a look in her face that Robur seemed to know already. "He looks very strong," she said, "and very kind. I think we had better wake him, and ask him to help us with our work."

Her voice sounded to Robur like that of an old friend, and yet he could not remember ever having seen so tiny a lady before.

But he liked her face and her voice, and it pleased him to hear her say that he looked strong and kind. He wondered what sort of

"The moment he found himself lying flat down among the ferns, they had ceased to be ferns—they were fairies."

work these small creatures had to do, and thought to himself that it would be like play to help them.

"How shall we wake him?" said one of them.

"I *am* awake," Robur said; "don't you see that my eyes are open, and that I have been looking at you all the time you have been talking about me?"

At this the fairies ran away frightened—all but the one whose face Robur thought he knew. She stood still, and said, "You are not angry with us, are you? We want some one to help us with our work, and you are strong—will you do it?"

"Of course I will," said Robur, jumping to his feet, and shaking the ground so that the little fairy almost tumbled over.

"Oh, you *are* strong!" she said, steadying herself against a toadstool, and trying not to look frightened.

Robur felt ashamed of having been so rough. He promised not to jump again, and asked her to take him to the place where her work was, and to show him what he could do to help her.

She led the way, and he followed, setting his foot down very carefully so as not to make another earthquake, or crush any of the little beings who swarmed about. All the place was full of fairies, and they were dancing a strange merry dance like that of midges in the air. But as Robur's guide went along she clapped her hands now and again, and cried, "Make way; make way." And at that they stopped dancing and stood in lines, making a passage for her and Robur to pass through.

They all stared at Robur, and wondered aloud how any one could be so big and rough; and some of the ladies gave little screams, and gathered up their trains and ran back as if he were an ogre. He felt foolish and uncomfortable, and was beginning to be sorry that he had not pretended to be asleep, and let the fairies do their work by themselves. But when his little lady turned back and smiled at him he was glad he had not refused to help her. "Only, what in the world," he thought, "can such small creatures have to do in the way of work?"

They got beyond the crowd of dancing fairies to a place where the ground was cleared. For a moment it reminded Robur of the clearing in which his own work lay. But he looked again and saw that it was very different. In the first place it was quite a small plot, not half so big as an ordinary garden-lawn; then the grass was very smooth-shaven, and it was closed in by a paling

about a hand's breadth in height. The fairy opened a gate in the paling and went through, but Robur stepped over.

"I thought you would do that," she said. "Now, if you are not tired with the walk, I will show you our work at once. But if you are, you shall lie down and rest, and we will wait till to-morrow for your help."

Robur assured her that he was not tired. They had walked about twenty yards, and had he not noticed that she was out of breath, he would have laughed outright at the idea of being tired with walking such a little way.

"Well then," she said, "if you are not tired, we will set to at once, and then we may be able to finish our work this evening. We are building a Bower of Ease. It has taken us years to get so far with it, and this afternoon we said in despair that we must leave it unfinished—the last part of the work is too hard for such little creatures as we are. If you had not come we must have given it up. But you will help us, will you not?" She smiled very happily at Robur, and he felt more sure than ever that he had seen her somewhere before, but he could not remember where.

"There is our bower," she said, pointing to a pyramid of flowers that stood in a corner of the grass-plot. "It is so high," she said, "that we cannot get to the top without climbing up the flowers, and that crushes them, so that we have to put fresh ones, and we never get any forwarder."

Again Robur found it difficult not to laugh. The top of the pyramid was hardly higher than his shoulder. It was just such a plaything as he and Amor had made together many a time on an evening with the daffodils and primroses that they gathered in the woods. The only difference that he could see was that the flowers the fairies used were a thousand times smaller than any he had ever seen growing, and when he touched them he found that they were not real.

"We make them," said the fairy, seeing that he looked confused. "Real flowers would not do—they fade; besides, they have faults; these are perfect, that is the only thing in which they are unlike real ones."

Robur saw that this was true. Wonderfully small as they were, every flower was a perfect imitation of a real one, even to the

scent and the softness of the petals. He began to think that the fairies were very clever little people.

"But what am I to do?" he said; "your bower seems finished. I should only spoil it by meddling with it."

"No, it is not finished," said the fairy, sadly; "it is not crowned yet. Do you not see that it is open at the top, so that the rain comes in? We want to crown it with a lily-cup, and not one of us has yet succeeded in climbing to the top without spoiling the flowers on the sides. We have been trying for years, and we are in despair."

"Give me the lily, and I will crown your bower," said Robur.

The fairy clapped her hands, and cried, "Bring the lily-cup, the bower is to be crowned at last."

Then six small fairies came in sight, carrying a little hurdle made of fine withes, on which the lily-cup was laid. It was a real lily-cup, as large as that on the plants in the garden at home, and it was quite a heavy load for the little people to carry. They set down the hurdle once or twice as they came along, in order that they might rest and take breath. Robur took the flower from them, and placed it on the top of the pyramid. The Bower of Ease was crowned, and all the little people clapped their hands for joy.

They gathered round Robur, praising him and thanking him as though he had done them a service that had cost him great pain and trouble. He felt ashamed, and wanted to run away, but they crowded so thickly round him that he could not stir without hurting some of them. His friend saw that he looked uncomfortable: she thought he must be tired, and she came up to him and said very earnestly, "You kind, strong friend, you have done us a service that we can never forget. But we will not trouble you with our thanks now. You are tired, and you must rest. Let me lead you into the bower. You shall lie down on a bed of flowers while we get supper ready. You will sup with our king and queen to-night, and over the meal they will thank you as you deserve to be thanked."

Again Robur declared that he was not tired, and again he had difficulty in not laughing at the notion that he possibly could be. But the fairy would not believe him.

"It is only because you are so brave that you will not own it," she said. "Come into the bower and rest."

He could see that she wished it very much, so he followed her to the entrance of the bower. But on the threshold he paused. The door was so low that he could not pass through it. He looked from it to her. "It is impossible," he said; "I am too big."

The fairy was as much puzzled as he was. She said sadly, "I do not know what is to be done. I fear you are too big to stay with us."

But another answered quickly, "There is no difficulty. Only forget that you have ever seen a larger door and you will find it easy to pass."

She spoke so decidedly that Robur believed her at once. He thought no more about the size of the door, but went up to it as a matter of course, and truly enough there was no difficulty. He had not even to bend his head, he could pass as easily as through the door of his own home.

He felt bewildered, and looked back to ask the fairies for an explanation, but they were gone. Then he looked round him at the bower itself. It no longer seemed a plaything, but a real building, large enough to hold a crowd of human people—though at this moment there was no one in it save himself. And stranger even than the change that had come over the bower was the change in the world outside. As he looked through the doorway, he noticed that the tall pine trees were dwindling down, and that the far-off sky and the great clouds, with the red sun setting in their midst, had grown so dim that he could hardly see them. He put his hand above his eyes to shade his sight, and got a clearer view, but it was useless. In a moment pine trees and sun and sky were gone, and he could see nothing beyond the fairy grass-plot, and the hand-high paling that bounded it. A great weariness came upon him: he thought to himself, "It must have been hard work after all;" and creeping to a corner where the bed of flowers was prepared for him, he lay down, and fell into a dreamless sleep.

He was awakened by the fairies coming to call him to supper. They led him to the royal table, and made him sit down at the right hand of the queen. The king welcomed him with great ceremony, the queen said words of gracious thanks; all along the table there was a murmur of admiration. Robur felt as proud as

on the day when he had knocked down the boy who didn't want to play prisoners' base. He looked up and down the table for the fairy who had first spoken to him. He wanted to see her kind face there by him again. But she was not there.

"You are looking for your friend," said the queen; "but you will not find her. She does not belong to the court; she is one of our workers, a very humble little body: all whom you see here are important people."

"And what do they do?" asked Robur.

"Nothing," said the queen. "The workers *do*; we *enjoy*."

"But I am a worker," thought Robur; "why am I here?"

Again the queen answered his thought. "You are here because you are big. It amuses us to have big people staying with us. If you will promise never to go away, we will pet you as much as you like; you shall sup every night at our table, and do what you will all day."

Robur did not like the queen as much as his friend the worker; he did not feel at all sure that he would stay to amuse her. He was going to say so, but she stopped him.

"Hush!" she said, "the king is going to make a speech, he hates to be interrupted; you must be quiet."

The king was on his legs, holding a glass of wine in his hand: a tall fairy was standing behind his chair and calling for silence.

Robur held his tongue, and wondered what the speech would be about. To his surprise it was all about himself.

The king said:

"Ladies and Gentlemen,—This is the happiest day of my whole reign; that which we always desired has happened to us at last; a stranger from the human world has come to visit us, and not as other human people have come before, to trample our subjects under foot, and destroy our work with their rough ugly hands. This one, though he is stronger than any other human being we have ever seen, is full of kindness towards us; he has already crowned the bower at which our people have been labouring for years without hope; he is willing to eat and drink with us; he values our thanks, and does not despise our friendship. He is only waiting, I believe, for a hearty invitation from us all to settle among us for ever and lose all remembrance of the human world in which he has lived till now. That he should do this is the

dearest wish of my heart. Will you all join me in drinking his health, and praying him to make our kingdom his home?"

Then the king lifted his glass to his lips and bowed to Robur; and the queen sipped hers and smiled at him; and all down the table the courtiers did the same, till Robur felt giddy with delight.

The queen touched him with her fan, and said, "*You* must make a speech now, you know;" and he jumped up and stammered out that he was very much ashamed, and very proud, and very much obliged; and of course as they were so kind, he should be delighted to stay with them. And then they all began to cheer, and Robur sat down again.

"I knew you would stay," said the queen, "though you thought you wouldn't just now when I asked you. Big creatures always like to be made much of."

VII.

SUPPER was over, and they moved away from the table. Lovely moonlight lighted the grass; faint music sounded in the air; the fairies of the plot-court began to dance, and made Robur dance with them. Suddenly they all ran away from him, and gathered into a knot in a corner of the grass-plot. They seemed to be discussing some very serious business. Their faces had an anxious look; they spoke eagerly, and with much gesture. The only one who did not look grave was the queen. At first she only listened to what the others said, but all the while there was a mischievous smile on her face, and when at last she began to speak she pointed at Robur in a way that made him feel sure she was talking of him. He thought they must be plotting some trick against him, and he began to wish he had not promised to stay among them.

By-and-by the knot of fairies broke up, and the queen came towards Robur. "We have been planning a new game," she said, "and we want you to take part in it. Will you do just as I tell you?"

Robur said he would, and she led him into the bower and made him lie down in the centre of it. Then all the fairies came trooping in—gliding—sliding—whirling. They carried flowers in their hands, which twisted themselves into a network as they wound in and out and round about. Robur lay still on the ground—wondering and amused. Suddenly the queen clapped her hands, and all the fairies fled. Robur tried to jump up and run after

them; but he found himself caught in a net of flowers, and he could not stir. He laughed good-temperedly, and lay down again.

"So this was their game—to catch him in a net of flowers, and then run away and leave him." Well, he was very comfortable, and quite content to spend the night where he was. He shut his eyes, and thought he would go to sleep; but the moment he did so, a hand touched his shoulder, and a voice he knew well said, "Robur!"

He opened his eyes, and saw a sad face looking at him—a bewildering, beautiful face, that he seemed to know for a moment, and then again not to know. Was it Amor? He thought so for an instant, but before he could say her name he was aware that it was not she but the fairy worker who had been so friendly to him. And then a little more looking seemed to change the face again, and it was neither that of a fairy nor that of a little human girl, but the face of a full-grown woman, who was like both, but far more lovely than either.

After she had called his name she did not speak, but only looked at him with sad, reproachful eyes.

"What do you want with me?" asked Robur.

"I want you to come back to your work," she said.

"I cannot," he answered. "My work is too hard for me."

"Too hard for you!" she said. "I thought you were so strong."

"I am tired of being strong."

"Tired of being strong! How strange! when I am so tired of being weak."

"You are foolish," said Robur. "But I cannot wonder at your mistake. I, too, once thought that the strong had the best of it. People told me it was so, and I believed I should find it true. But it is not so. It is the weak who amuse themselves and are happy, while the strong ones work for them till they are worn out and die. At least, it is so in the human world, and that is why I have left it. Here it is different. What they call work is play to me, and they thank me for what costs me nothing. I mean to stay here."

She did not answer, but the sadness deepened in her face, and her look of reproach grew so terrible that Robur felt that he could not bear it. He tried to jump up and run away, but the wreaths of flowers held him; and he saw her smile pitifully at his vain struggles to escape.

He shut his eyes so as not to see her, but that made no difference. Her face was there just the same. It seemed to him that it would haunt him always, whether he slept or waked.

"You think I am a coward," he said, "and you despise me because I like to stay where I am happy. But you know nothing about it. You are weak, and no one expects you to work. You never have to work till your back feels broken day after day and week after week—lying down tired every night, and getting up tired every morning. You don't know what it is to be promised riches, and freedom, and fun, and to get only work, and pain, and bondage. You think that if one is strong one can do everything for everybody, and enjoy oneself into the bargain. It is so here. But in the human world it is terrible to be strong."

She was still silent, and still her face seemed to pity and reproach him.

"You do not believe me," said Robur; "but it is not only I who say so. It has been so always. The strong have had to work for the weak, and they have had nothing for themselves but pain, and misery, and death. They have tried to help the weak, and they have been punished for it instead of being thanked. There was a Strong One many thousand years ago, who wrestled with the powers that oppress the world, and won good gifts for all mankind, and his reward was to be chained for ever to a rock while vultures gnawed his heart out. There was a Deliverer—a Loving One—of whom it is said that he was the son of a Great Ruler whose subjects were miserable rebels, and that for sheer love and pity he left his father's house and all the glory to which he was born, and went to live among them to help them to be better. He took upon him all the wretchedness that came of their misdoing; he fought their battle against the evil one who had tempted them to disobedience; he shared their want, their shame, and their disgrace. And after he had served them for a little while, they turned against him and denied his love, and put him to a cruel and a shameful death. And once, not so long ago, there was a ship that went out to sea laden with many human lives—women and children, and a great body of soldiers, and the ship struck upon a rock, and the water rushed in, and the ship began to sink. And then what happened? Perhaps you think that the strong men got away safely, and only the women and the children were drowned. But it was just the

other way: the sailors got the boats ready, and the soldiers stood on the deck and lifted the women and children into them, and saw them all go off safely, while they went down in the ship. It is always so; and I say again that it is better to be weak than to be strong."

Her eyes flashed, and this time she spoke.

"But *they* did not say so. They suffered willingly, and gloried in having helped the weak. The Strong One chained to the rock never flinches, though the vulture's claws have been tearing him for many thousand years. The Loving One did not repent because his reward was a cruel death. The soldiers cheered as they went down, content that they had done their duty and helped the weak out of their distress. Oh, no! it is not terrible but glorious to be strong to help and suffer."

"What, then, is terrible?" said Robur.

"It is terrible when the strong grow tired and leave the weak to suffer without help. It is terrible to see what I see when I look through these flower walls into the real world that you have run away from."

"What do you see?" asked Robur.

"Look for yourself."

"But I see nothing but the flowers."

"Then I have come too late," she said; and the sadness of her face became a great anguish that Robur could not bear to look upon.

He tried once more to start to his legs. He wanted to take her in his arms and kiss her, for now she seemed to him to be indeed the little Amor whom he could always comfort thus. But the flower bands held him back. He could not reach her; he could only look into her sad eyes and feel that their pain would kill him.

But while he looked the flowery walls became transparent to him, and he saw through them as she had said that she saw. And first it seemed to him that the sky above was crowded with sad faces like her own, and that all their eyes were bent on him reproachfully. Then the faces melted away, and in their stead appeared on all sides pictures of suffering and horror—scenes of untended sickness, helpless poverty, and lonely death. On one side he saw a plague-stricken city, where the poor were dying in the streets, while the rich had fled to a pleasant garden where they could be safe and merry; on another a burning ship full of

people mad with fear—mothers forgetting their children, and trying to scramble into already crowded boats, strong men pushing them back into the flames, and leaping themselves into the place of safety.

"The cowards!" Robur cried, and he sprang wildly to his feet. The flower-bands snapped in a moment, the walls of the fairy bower tumbled about him, two great strides carried him across the tiny grass-plot.

* * * * *

"Robur! Robur!" cried Amor's voice behind him. And he cried back, "I cannot stay! They want me! They are weak, and it is terrible to be weak and to suffer."

But Amor's arms were round his neck, holding him fast. He gathered up all his strength and pushed her from him.

"I must go!" he said again; "I must go to all these people who are weak and miserable."

"What people?" cried Amor; "I see none. We are alone. Oh, Robur, do not leave us again!"

"But I must," he answered, wildly. "It was you who said so; you showed them to me, and I see them now. I can see nothing else. They crowd upon me. Amor, let me go. I *will* go!"

"But there are no people here," said Amor; "and it is we at home who are weak and want you. Oh, Robur, Robur!" She ended with a shriek.

"I must go!" said Robur, once again.

But, as he said so, he opened his eyes and found himself sitting in the great pine forest, with the real Amor kneeling by him—covering his face with kisses, and crying for joy at having found him.

"We thought you were lost for ever," she said. But Robur did not speak. His long strange dream so filled his mind that as yet he could not feel sure that it was indeed a dream. It seemed to him that he had really run away from his work like a coward to spend his life in the pleasant idleness of fairy land, and that he would never have been brought back had not Amor come to him, and showed him that terrible picture of the weak suffering and the strong refusing help. Such a great shame was upon him that he hardly dared to look into Amor's eyes. He feared that he should see there the reproach that he had seen in his dream. But she

spoke so kindly that he could not long turn away, and when he at last took courage to look up he saw no reproach at all in her face, but only a great love that made him feel sure the bad dream was gone for ever.

Then he remembered how he had sunk down weary at sunset and fallen asleep among the ferns; and he looked for the woman's bundle that he had promised to carry to the town. It was lying on the ground just where it had fallen. Yes, it was clear that he had been dreaming ever since.

"How long have I been away?" he asked of Amor.

"A whole night and half a day," she answered, "and all the village has been sorrowing. The mother is half dead with grief—the neighbours say that there is no one who could so ill be spared. And I have been looking for you all over the forest ever since the day began to dawn."

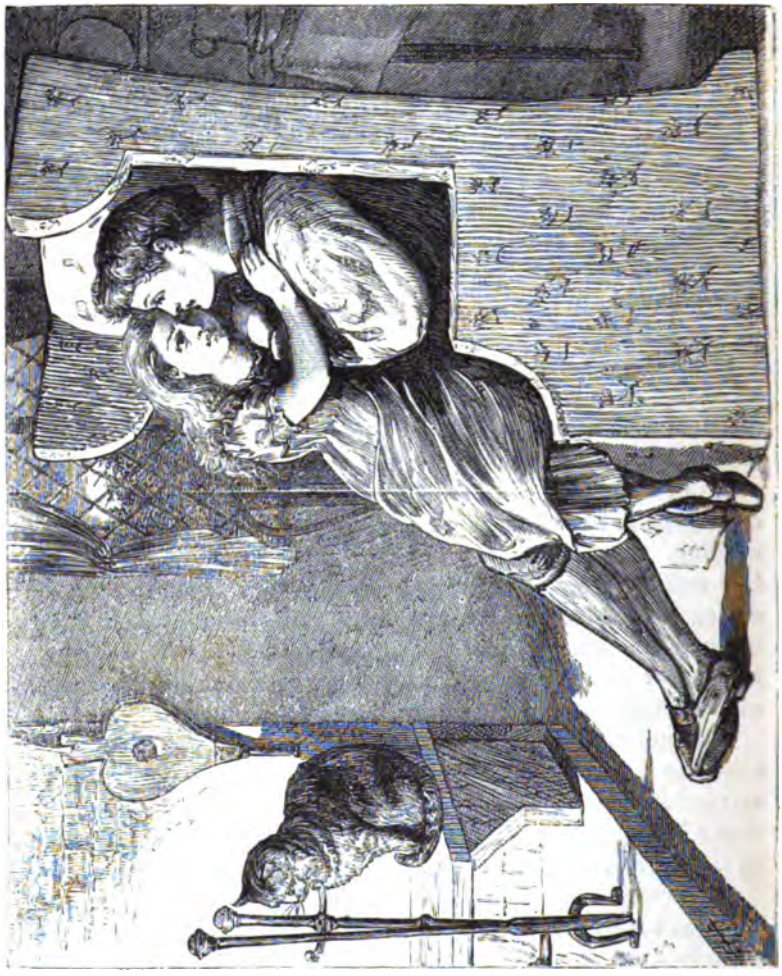
"You dear Amor, to love me so!" said Robur; and he took her hand and they walked home together.

The mother was standing at the garden gate, watching. She had stood there all night; she had refused to go to bed; she had eaten no breakfast; she would not speak to anyone; and if anyone spoke to her she shook her head impatiently, and would hear nothing. Her boy had gone away from her, and she could not live without him. She said to herself, "He was so good and so strong, and we let him work too hard for us, and he could not bear it, and he is gone. It is our own fault, and we are fitly punished." For Amor had told her of those strange words he had spoken about going away to a far-off country.

The mother would not go to look for him, and when Amor said that she was going, she said, "Let him alone, child. He has worked for us long enough; he must work for himself now." But Amor had gone, none the less. And the mother stood watching at the gate—hoping, though she said there was no hope.

Robur saw her before she saw him, and he could hardly believe she was his own mother to whom he had said good-bye when he went to work on the morning of the day before. Years seemed to have passed over her in that night and day. She was bent down like an old woman; her face was haggard, and her eyes looked wild. Robur ran to her, and she opened her arms and gave a great cry of joy.

Very quickly the news spread through the village that Robur had come back, and the neighbours came flocking to the cottage to make sure that it was true; and all the day went in rejoicing.



But in the evening, when the family were alone together, Amor came and sat on Robur's knee, and he told her the story of his dream.

ELLA.

I.

In the time of long ago, when all the old people were young, and all the young people had never even been thought of, there was a certain baron who had one only daughter, named Ella.

These two lived all by themselves in an old red-bricked many-gabled house, which stood on the borders of a thick wood. The baron's wife had died when Ella was quite a little girl, and the father and daughter were left alone.

Ella was a good and simple-minded little maiden, and very fond of her father, but it must be confessed that she sometimes found her life rather lonely. As a child, she had no playmates or young companions, and as she grew older she had few amusements. Of course, she could read, but she had not many books. She could also work with her needle, knit stockings, and make pastry and all sorts of nice cakes, which old Nancy, the cook, had taught her to do; and she could garden, and knew the names of all the flowers, and all the trees, and all the birds which lived in the wood near her home.

But she was sadly ignorant of many things which young ladies ought to know. She had never learned dancing, except from the leaves which the autumn winds swept from the trees. She had never learned singing, except from the birds who piped and chaunted their songs to her as they peeped at her from the green boughs. She did not know what a pianoforte was like, and if you had talked French to her she would have taken it for gibberish. She was occasionally rather at a loss for some one to chatter nonsense to. Of course, her papa was out of the question. He was a great deal too grave and steady. Nancy was so deaf, poor soul! that she couldn't hear a word that was said to her; and Franz, the gardener, was a cross old man, and not at all the sort of person for a young lady to make an associate of.

These were the only human beings about the place. Neither were there any dumb animals for her to pet; for old Nancy had the greatest objection both to cats and dogs, and never allowed one to enter the house.

Fortunately for Ella, there were the birds. Without these dear friends and gossips the girl's life would have been lonely indeed. But from a child she had loved them, and they had loved her. In the pleasant summer time she would spend long hours in the woods, talking to them and learning their sweet notes, and in the winter she would stand by the open window and feed them from her own hand. They knew her perfectly well. She had but to open the casement and call to them, when they would all come flocking in, and some were so tame that they would perch on her shoulder, and eat out of her mouth. When she talked to them, she felt sure that they understood every word that she said, and hey certainly did their best to answer her. Still she could not help wishing sometimes that they could speak her language, or that she had some friends and playmates who could do so. "How I wish that I had a brother or, still better, a sister!" she would say sometimes. "How nice it would be!"

She had just been thinking this, one wet autumn evening, when she had been sitting for a long time in the twilight beside her father, waiting until he had finished his pipe, and hoping, for the sake of having something to do, that supper would soon be ready.

Suddenly the baron broke silence. "Ella, my child, would you like to have some nice young companions—some sisters?" he asked.

"Oh, papa," returned the girl, quite startled; "how could you guess? That is just what I was wishing for."

"Then, my child," the baron went on, in his slow way; "you ought to be very happy, for there is every reason to believe your wish will be gratified."

"How, papa? What do you mean?" cried Ella, eagerly.

The baron took one or two long pulls at his pipe before replying.

"To-morrow, my dear," he said at last, "I am going to give you, not only a new mamma, but two handsome and clever sisters, and I feel no doubt you will find their society a great

advantage and comfort to you. In short, my beloved daughter," added the baron, affectionately, "in making this arrangement, I

"The birds were so tame that they would perch on her shoulder and eat out of her mouth."

have been actuated more by a desire for your happiness than for my own."

As he spoke the expression of Ella's face changed a good deal.

In truth, she scarcely knew whether to be pleased or grieved. She was certainly very much astonished; and though she had often and often wished for sisters, it had never occurred to her to wish for a new mamma. She still had a very fond remembrance of her own mother, and she was not quite sure that she would be glad to see her place occupied by another. Still—two sisters! Could anything be more exactly what she had always wished for? And since her papa had been so thoughtful as to make these arrangements on her account, ought she not to be grateful?

"Well?" asked the baron, as Ella was silently turning these matters over in her mind.

"I think I shall like them all very much," said Ella, "and be very happy."

"You're sure to be that, if you are a good girl and do as you're bid," returned her papa, as though he were reading the sentences from the top of a copy-book.

The next morning the baron went off to fetch home his bride, and Ella put on her best Sunday frock in honour of her new mamma and sisters, and to be in readiness to receive them.

As, however, she found waiting about the home rather tiresome work, she, after a while, wandered into the wood to pass the time and tell her friends, the birds, of all the great events which were taking place. As soon as they saw her they began flocking about her after their usual fashion, and as they at once observed that she had on her Sunday frock, they all set to work to trill their very best, that is to say, their Sunday songs, fancying that they must have made a mistake in the day. For, of course, you will have observed, dear readers, that the birds have a special hymnal of choicest tunes which they keep for Sunday singing. When, however, Ella began telling them the news of what was about to happen, they left off singing and seemed all at once in a very great fuss.

"What is the matter with you?" asked Ella; "don't you think that I and my sisters will be very happy together?"

"'Birds in their little nests agree,' But not so always sisters three," pipes a linnet, who was of rather a melancholy turn of mind.

"Oh! you cross, disagreeable thing," said Ella; "how can you talk so! I believe you are just jealous because I'm going to

have some new friends, but that's very silly of you, because, however fond I may be of them, it can't make any difference in my love for you, my dear old pets and companions."

When the birds heard this, they were comforted and, perching quite in a crowd on Ella's shoulders and head, sang "Should auld acquaintance be forgot?" in chorus, and whispered all kinds of soft loving assurances in her ear.

It was not long before Ella, and the birds too, heard the rumbling of wheels in the distance.

"There," cried the girl, "are my new relations, and I must run now to greet them."

So, thus dismissed, the birds flew off in a crowd to their homes among the green branches, and Ella flew off as fast as her legs would carry her in the direction of her home. She went so fast that she caught her Sunday frock in a bramble by the way and tore a great rent in it, but she was so eager and excited that she did not stop now or think much about it. As she reached the house, panting and breathless, with her hair flying wild in the wind, she was delighted to find that she was just in time, for at the same moment a handsome carriage rolled up to the door, in which were seated her papa and three elegantly dressed ladies.

II.

Out of the great gilded coach stepped the Baron, offering his arm to the Baroness, and so, in state, they marched up the steps and into the house, the lady's train of silk and lace rustling after her, and keeping the other two ladies quite at a distance. They had elegant trains of their own, however, to rustle in their turn, and chains and jewels, and all manner of fine things, and the loveliest bonnets, straight from Paris, and they looked altogether so gorgeous, and, as our simple-minded Ella thought, so very queer, that she was quite overwhelmed with astonishment and awe. She was, you see, unused to the sight of the latest Paris fashions.

As the Baron and the Baroness entered the house, the servants, who were waiting to receive them, bowed and curtsied, but Ella, with her torn frock and tumbled hair, shrinking back amazed, could only stare with wide-open eyes and mouth. Her appearance attracted the lady's attention.

"Who is that shock-headed girl?" she asked of her husband.

The Baron turned quickly round to look.

"That—dear me!" said he. "That, my love, is my daughter. Come, child, and speak to the Baroness, and don't stand looking like a goose," he added, in an undertone, to Ella.

So encouraged, Ella ventured timidly forward.

"Umph," said the Baroness, taking up her eyeglass to inspect her new daughter. "We shall know one another better by-and-by, I suppose." But Ella felt all the time that she was looking at nothing so much as that unfortunate rent in her dress.

Then the Baroness turned and waved her hand majestically towards the young ladies in her rear.

"These," she said, "are *my* daughters, Sophia-Matilda and Jemima-Anne," and her manner seemed to imply: Just observe the vast difference, if you please, between these elegant and beautiful creatures and yourself, you mean and shabby little girl. At any rate, this was what Ella understood her to mean, and she felt more abashed than ever in the presence of her overpowering sisters.

They, however, shook hands with her, and endeavoured to draw her into conversation. "Tell us," said the eldest, Sophia-Matilda, "what sort of a neighbourhood this is, my dear."

"Oh," said Ella, "it's very pretty in some parts, and the woods are lovely."

Sophia-Matilda burst out laughing. "What a ridiculous child!" said she. "What sort of a neighbourhood is it for visiting? What kind of people are there?"

"Lor, Sophia, how should she know?" put in the other sister. "She doesn't go out."

"But indeed I do," returned Ella, quickly. "I go out a great deal—particularly in the summer. And as for the people, they are as nice as can be."

"Whom do you know?" asked Sophia.

"Oh, everybody, of course. Haven't I lived here all my life?" said Ella. "But I go oftenest to see old Betty, that is Nancy the cook's mother, because she is sick and lame, and can't get out her ."

At this innocent speech, both Sophia-Matilda and Jemima-Anne

went into such fits of laughter, that Ella was quite sure she must have made some capital joke, only she couldn't see it.

"What is it?" she asked. "Did I say anything so funny?" At which they both went off into fits again.

"Did you ever see such a comical child in your life?" gasped Sophia-Matilda, as soon as she could find breath.

"It's perfectly killing," said Jemima-Anne, wiping the tears of laughter from her cheeks.

"And now, suppose you show us the house and our rooms," suggested Sophia; "for I suppose it will soon be time to dress for dinner."

Ella stared so, that Sophia asked, "Whatever's the matter now, child?"

"I was only thinking," stammered Ella, very much confused "aren't you dressed now?'

Then the two sisters laughed again.

"Anyhow," said Jemima, "if *we* are, you certainly are not."

Ella glanced down with a blush at the rent in her dress.

"Oh! you mean that," said she. "Yes, I must mend it. It's a pity, isn't it? because it's my Sunday frock, you see."

At which Sophia-Matilda and Jemima-Ann laughed to such an extent that Ella thought they were never going to stop.

They were, at any rate, merry girls enough, and "there is no fear," thought Ella, "of my being dull or lonely any more. Just now I am rather frightened at these smart and beautiful young ladies, to be sure, but by-and-by I dare say we shall get on very well, and if they will only be kind to me, I am certain I shall love them dearly."

However, as time went on, it did not seem that Ella's hopes in this matter were to be fulfilled.

Ella, with the sweetness and humility which were part of her nature, tried to make herself as agreeable as she knew how, both to the Baroness and to her daughters, but she did not obtain from them any great amount of kindness in return.

The Baroness complained to her husband that "the girl," as she called her, was lamentably ignorant of everything that she ought to know, and that her tastes were low.

"Poor child," returned the Baron; "you see she has suffered under many disadvantages; but now, under your guidance, my

dear," he added, gallantly, "and in the society of your accomplished daughters, she will doubtless improve."

"She knows actually nothing," said the Baroness.

"She only wants teaching. If you or one of the young ladies would take her in hand now——"

"A pretty notion, indeed!" retorted the lady. "Do you expect me and my daughters to turn governesses to that hoyden? No, no; you needn't think it."

The young ladies had a beautiful new piano sent to them, on which they used to practise for several hours daily, one after the other, or sometimes together, and to the accompaniment of which they used to sing very difficult and excruciating duets. Ella used to listen to them entranced, and was most anxious for a little instruction; but neither Sophia nor Jemima would trouble herself to teach her—until, at last, one day Sophia, who was certainly the more good-natured of the two, struck a bargain with her. Sophia, who was very fond of sweets, found out that Ella knew how to make some almond-cakes, of which she was particularly fond, and she promised that, whenever Ella brought her one of these favourite cakes, she would give her a music-lesson. Sometimes she fulfilled her promise, and sometimes she did not. But by this means Ella contrived to learn a little, and she would get up in the morning quite early, hours before the others were astir, in order to practise. Unfortunately, however, one morning the Baroness happened to be wakeful, and finding the scale of C played up and down in a rather stumbling manner—one hand at a time—somewhat irritating to the nerves, she at once put a stop to these performances, and to the lessons.

"But I shall expect my almond-cakes all the same," said Sophia.

"Certainly, my darling," said her mother. "There is no reason why you should not have them. There is nothing, besides, that Ella likes so much as muddling down in the kitchen, and making herself a figure. It's the only thing she's fit for," she added, contemptuously.

III.

ALTOGETHER, poor Ella found that her path in life was at this time anything but a smooth or pleasant one. She tried to be good, to be

obedient to her step-mother, and to be kind and obliging to her two step-sisters. She made almond-cakes for Sophia-Matilda, picked up the stitches which the Baroness dropped whenever she attempted to knit, and darned Jemima-Anne's stockings, but for all these little services she received but scant thanks or courtesy, and whenever she happened to do the least thing wrong, she got terribly scolded. In short, she was not appreciated.

Now, it is certainly a very hard thing not to be appreciated; to have all one's good qualities looked at, as it were, through the wrong end of a telescope, and all one's bad qualities put under a microscope.

Ella felt it to be very hard, and sometimes she was inclined to say to herself that it was no use at all trying to be good, since no one gave her any credit for it, and she might just as well give it up as a bad job, and be, in truth, as naughty and tiresome, and stupid as everybody said she was.

This was, of course, when she was really in a very naughty mood; for nothing can be so bad as not caring whether we are good or not. But at these times when she was miserable and despairing, fretted and worried as it seemed to her, beyond endurance, she would wander out into the woods and tell her troubles to her old companions, the birds. She had been very staunch in her friendship for them, and had faithfully kept her promise of loving them best—not having had, truth to tell, any strong temptation to do otherwise.

They need not have been jealous, had they known, of sisters Sophia-Matilda and Jemima-Anne. No, they would surely have been glad for their little friend Ella's sake, had the sisters given them more cause for jealousy. They were often quite grieved to see how unhappy Ella was, and did all that they could, in their simple bird-fashion, to cheer and console her. They would listen —their heads perched a little on one side—to all that Ella had to tell them, with most sympathising attention. And they were as good confidants as it was possible to have, for while they took everything in, they repeated nothing, and made no mischief. Little birds, we are told, whisper many things, but we may be quite sure of this—that they are a great deal too wise and too honourable to tell other folks' secrets.

During the first winter after the arrival of the Baroness and her

daughters at the castle, a new tie bound Ella and her feathered friends yet more firmly together than before, and that was the tie of a common persecution. One day, when the snow lay deep upon the ground, the Baroness found Ella at an open window surrounded by her pets, who were feeding out of her hand.

"What does all this mean?" asked the lady, angrily. "Do you want to give me my death of cold? Shut the window, child; send all those creatures away."

Ella prepared to obey, so far as shutting the window went.

"Go out, my darlings," she said, "and I will come and feed you in the garden."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," said the Baroness. "What are you giving them?—bread? I won't have such waste and extravagance. Where did you steal the bread from?"

"I didn't steal it," returned Ella, hotly; "I've always fed them ever since I can remember, and they would die all through the cold, hard winter if I didn't."

"Then let them die," said the Baroness; "nasty destructive things, that eat the fruit. I shall have them all shot."

"Oh! my birds, my precious, sweet birds!" cried the girl, in an agony; "you surely wouldn't do that."

"Well," said the Baroness, softening a little; "anyhow, I won't have the bread wasted on them. Your papa's always complaining of the money that's spent, and there's my dressmaker's bill yet to come in."

"These few poor little crumbs won't make much difference, surely," said Ella, pleadingly.

"Crumbs, indeed!" returned her step-mother; "now you are adding a falsehood to improve matters! How dare you call those great lumps of bread crumbs?"

Ella looked abashed, and was silent. She had certainly not meant to say what was not true; she had only in her eagerness exaggerated a little, forgetting, as we are all so apt to do, that exaggeration is falsehood after all.

"I tell you what," the Baroness went on; "if you want to feed those creatures, you may give them your own breakfast, and go without yourself. Not a bit of anything else shall you have."

"Very well," said Ella.

So, after this, the girl used to divide the little loaf that was given

her for her breakfast into two portions, a large one and a small one. The small one was for herself and the larger one for her *protégés.* And if the birds sometimes went hungry on these cold frosty mornings, so did our heroine.

Ella used to feel more sorry for her pets than for herself, and would often sit down and cry when they would come flocking about her in glad expectation of a meal, and were obliged to content themselves with a few sorry scraps.

But the birds would do what they could to console her. A pair of ring-doves, whom she specially cared for, would come and coo round her, and whisper, "We love you, we love you." Robin Redbreast, as he picked up his crumbs, would say, "Come, cheer up; come, cheer up; come, cheer up;" and the poetical linnet would compose little stanzas appropriate to the occasion, somemes tender and melancholy, sometimes resolute and inspiriting.

And at last the winter passed away, and the budding, tender spring came, with its thousand pleasant sights and scents and sounds, to cheer the hearts of all the world.

As the spring advanced it became evident to Ella that the house was in an unusual state of ferment and excitement. The Baroness and her daughters were closeted together now and again for an hour at a time in deep conversation. The Baroness was more than usually amiable to her step-daughter. The brow of the Baron, on the other hand, looked dark. Tradesmen were perpetually calling at the castle door and leaving there boxes and baskets of various shapes and sizes. The Baroness was continually making expeditions to the nearest market town.

At length the mystery was solved.

There was to be a grand ball at a neighbouring castle, which had long been unoccupied, but the owner had lately returned to it, and was about to celebrate the event by a series of merrymakings. Among other gay doings was to be this ball, which the Prince Hyanmitydurando—young, handsome, unmarried, and heir to all his father's vast dominions—had promised to grace with his presence.

The Baron and his family had received an invitation also, so no wonder the ladies were excited.

There is always found to be something extremely exhilarating in the atmosphere of royalty. Even the side view of a closely-

shut carriage in which some royal person is reclining, or the whizzing past of an express train which has the honour of conveying a crowned, or possibly-maybe-one-day-crowned head, is enough to stir up thousands of people to enthusiasm. But what are such poor enjoyments to the glory and delight of being asked to meet a royal highness at a ball, to breathe the same air, to tread the same floor, to dance, it maybe, in the same set, to be chosen perhaps—oh! crowning thought of joy—as his partner!

There really was some excuse to be made for the Baroness and her daughters.

As soon as the secret had oozed out, it may easily be imagined that there was little else talked of in the castle but the expected delights of this grand entertainment; that is to say, except in the presence of the Baron: doubtless because the ladies did not think that his taste in millinery would be worth consulting, or there might have been other reasons; we cannot tell.

But in Ella's presence no such reserve was shown, and the probable results of the ball were freely discussed by the two sisters.

"I shall no doubt meet that dear Count Top-of-the-tree," said Sophia-Matilda, clasping her hands together in ecstasy. "He can't fail to admire me in my yellow gauze."

"Yes, I daresay," returned Jemima-Anne, languidly. "For my part, I shall look at no one but the Prince himself—naturally."

"Umph," said her sister, rather snappishly. "The question is, my dear, whether he will as naturally look at you."

"And pray why shouldn't he?" asked Jemima.

"Oh, my dear! *really*," Sophia-Matilda giggled. "A cat may look at a king, you know," she said, "so I don't see why a king shouldn't—shouldn't look at a——" She hesitated.

"For shame!" said Jemima-Anne, sharply.

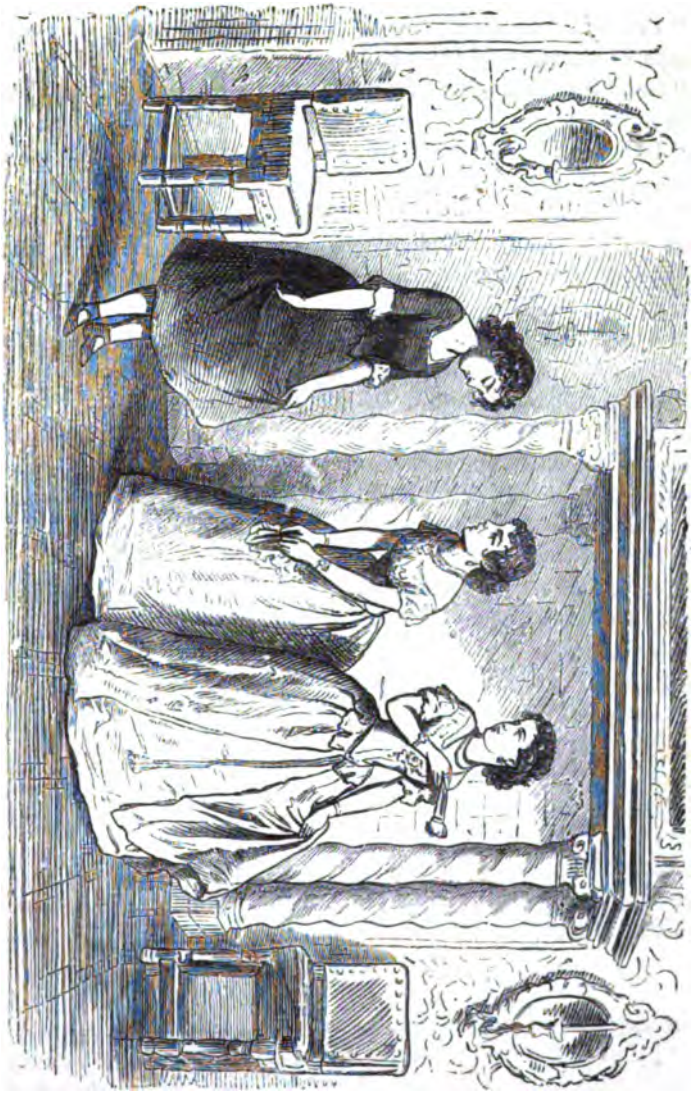
For neither in their little nest did these sisters always agree.

"How I should like to go!" said Ella, one day, when they were talking in this way.

"You!" laughed both the sisters. "That is a pretty notion. If you went, do you think the Prince would be likely to look at you, eh?"

"No," said Ella, blushing furiously. "I should never have thought of such a thing. But I should like to have just a peep at the beautiful rooms, and the gay dresses, and the dancing—and,

oh! how I should like to dance myself—just for once! Don't you"—after a pause—a sudden longing desire coming over



"I'm seventeen almost, though you do make me wear my frocks so short."

her—"don't you think you could persuade mamma to take me too?"

At this, you may be sure Sophia-Matilda and Jemima-Anne laughed more than ever.

"A chit of a child like you!" said Sophia-Matilda.

"I'm seventeen, almost—though you do make me wear my frocks so short," said poor Ella.

"Such a grub as you are, never fit to be seen!" said Jemima-Anne.

"I should look smart if I had fine clothes, like you, and sat at dainty wool-work all day, Sister Jemima."

"No, you wouldn't; not for two minutes together," returned that young lady. "And so you want to be running after the Prince, do you. Perhaps you think he'll fall in love with you, and marry you, eh?"

"A fine Princess you'd make, wouldn't you?" laughed Sophia-Matilda. "Let's hear how it sounds—Princess Ella—what a joke!"

"Pshaw!" said Jemima, "that isn't half fine enough. Princesses, you know, always have beautiful long names, like ours, two or three tacked on to one another. I think we might call you Princess Cinder-Ella, because you look just like a little dirty kitchen-maid."

At this, Ella began to cry.

"I think you are very unkind," she said.

"Never mind, Cinder-Ella," said Sophia-Matilda, "when I marry the Prince, you shall come and be my waiting-lady."

"You, indeed," retorted Jemima. "I like that. I don't mind giving up Count Top-of-the-tree to you. But I'm going to marry the Prince, let me tell you."

"No, you ain't."

"Yes, I am."

"No, you ain't."

"I tell you I am."

And so they went on for three-quarters of an hour, and never got any nearer settling the point as to which of them was to be the Prince's bride.

IV.

THE day of the ball arived, and dragged through its slow length.

"I don't think there ever was such a long day before. Do you?" said Jemima-Anne to Sophia-Matilda, when they had both tried on their yellow gauze-dresses five times.

To Cinder-Ella, too, the day was a long one, although she was kept pretty busy, doing this thing and that for her stepmother and sisters. For at the last moment, almost, the Baroness discovered that her turban did not *quite* become her, and Ella was called on to make an alteration in it. Sophia-Matilda's dress, too, was found to be wanting in numberless tapes, hooks, and eyes, which Ella had to supply, and Jemima-Anne's hair absolutely *would* not keep in curl, and Ella had three separate times during the course of the afternoon to twist it up in curl papers. But these little matters, though they kept Ella well employed, naturally affected to a considerable extent the temper of the ladies, and our little heroine was heartily glad when at length the great gilded coach, with the Baroness and her daughters inside it, drove off from the castle door.

No sooner, however, had the clatter of wheels and the tramp of the horses' feet died away in the distance, than Ella sat down and began to cry as though her heart would break.

After all, though virtue is said to be its own reward, virtue, especially when it is young and eager, can't help sometimes longing after rewards of a more exciting nature.

As Ella now sat crying, her head on her hand, she was startled by another hand which was laid upon her shoulder.

"What is the matter?" asked a voice, which should have belonged to her respected father, the Baron; but when she looked up she felt quite sure that it could not be he—so very gorgeous was the gentleman before her. Before she could speak, or had in the least recovered from her astonishment, he said again—

"What are you crying about? Is it because you have not gone to the ball?"

Ella was almost ashamed to confess to so much weakness. But as it was the truth, she stammered out, "Yes, papa," and she set to work crying again as hard as ever she could.

Presently she looked up, and saw the Baron still standing in front of her. Then she said, as well as she could for sobs—

"Are you going too, papa? I thought you had a headache, and couldn't."

"My headache is better," returned the Baron, "and I am only waiting for you."

Ella started up. "For *me*, papa?"

"Yes," said her father. "Why don't you go and get ready?"

Ella thought that her father had certainly gone mad, especially when he went on to say—

"But I forgot. I have the key of the chest where your ball-dress is; come with me and I will unlock it."

Dumb with surprise, Ella followed her father through room after room of the castle, along corridors, and up and down staircases, until they came to a small attic in a turret, in the middle of which stood a great oak chest. This the Baron opened with a golden key which he carried in his pocket, and displayed to his little daughter's astonished gaze a most beautiful dress of satin and brocade, ornamented and sewn in with pearls and other precious stones.

"This," said the Baron, "is for you to wear. It was worn by your mother, my dear child, and I have kept it for your first ball. These jewels," the Baron went on, lifting up a massive chatelaine of antique work and a coronet of diamonds; "these will suit the dress. They belonged to an ancestress of ours hundreds of years ago, and are not to be matched in the country. Now, be quick and get ready."

Ella scarcely knew whether she was standing on her head or on her heels. She took up the beautiful dress, and handled it and admired it and tried it on, and found that it fitted her to perfection—for, in truth, she was the image of her mother, both in face and form. Then she ran down and showed herself to her father.

"Splendid," said the Baron, who had slipped off his velvet and lace coat to enjoy the luxury of a pipe; "we shall take a 'rise' out of Madam after all," said he, meaning his wife. And then he chuckled. "I told her that I would not allow her and her girls to go to the ball unless you went too. And yet she has chosen to disobey me. We shall see who will get the best of it yet."

The Baron was very brave now that his wife was well out of the way. He was an easy-going man, and had allowed himself to be considerably over-ridden by his lady-wife. But even worms will turn, it is said, under a certain pressure. And if worms, why not Barons?

The Baron was, on this occasion, as joyful as any boy let loose

from school, and capered about quite like a juvenile goat. Ella also capered about in extreme self-satisfaction. But in so doing she suddenly caught sight of her own feet.

"Oh, papa," she said, holding out one hob-nailed shoe, through which a toe was peeping, "look at this!"

The Baron obeyed, and, as he looked, his face fell.

"Haven't you got any shoes for me? I can't go in these," said Ella, mournfully.

Now this was just the point in the arrangement which the Baron had forgotten.

"Bless my heart!" he said, dismayed.

But this did not mend matters, nor the shoes either.

Father and daughter held a brief and painful debate. What was to be done?

Question put: Could a young lady go to the Prince's ball with her toes through her hob-nailed shoes?

Carried unanimously: the "Noes" have it.

Can anything be done in the matter?

The Baron painfully shakes his head, and takes long pulls at his pipe.

Ella shakes her head too; and, amid bitter tears of disappointment and mortification, lays aside her beautiful garments, and puts on once more her old well-worn frock.

"You had better go without me, papa," she sobs.

"No, I won't," says the Baron, shortly.

In her distress, Ella wanders out of the house into the garden. It is now evening, but the moon is shining so brightly that all the birds are as wide awake as they can be, and as soon as they see Ella they come flocking and fluttering about her as usual. When they see that she is crying they at once get into a terrible fuss, and want to know all about it.

Ella, delighted to have some outlet for her grief and disappointment, tells the whole story, and then sits down disconsolately, to nurse her sorrow, on a little mound at the foot of a wide-spreading tree. The birds, in the meantime, all fly away from her—rather unkindly, Ella thinks. But, after a while, she is attracted by the sound of a great noise and commotion up in the tree above her head—a great flapping of wings and rustling of feathers.

"What can be the matter?" says Ella, quickly jumping up to

see, and forgetting her own troubles in her anxiety for her friends. As she does so, something hard and yet something soft brushes her cheek, and falls on the ground at her feet. She stoops to find it. What can it be? As she does so, there is a still greater rustling above her head than before, and something else, soft and glistening in the moonlight, falls gently down on the soft green turf beside her.

With a cry of astonishment and delight, she picks up a pair of tiny slippers, made of softest down and feathers.

"What can this mean?" cries the girl.

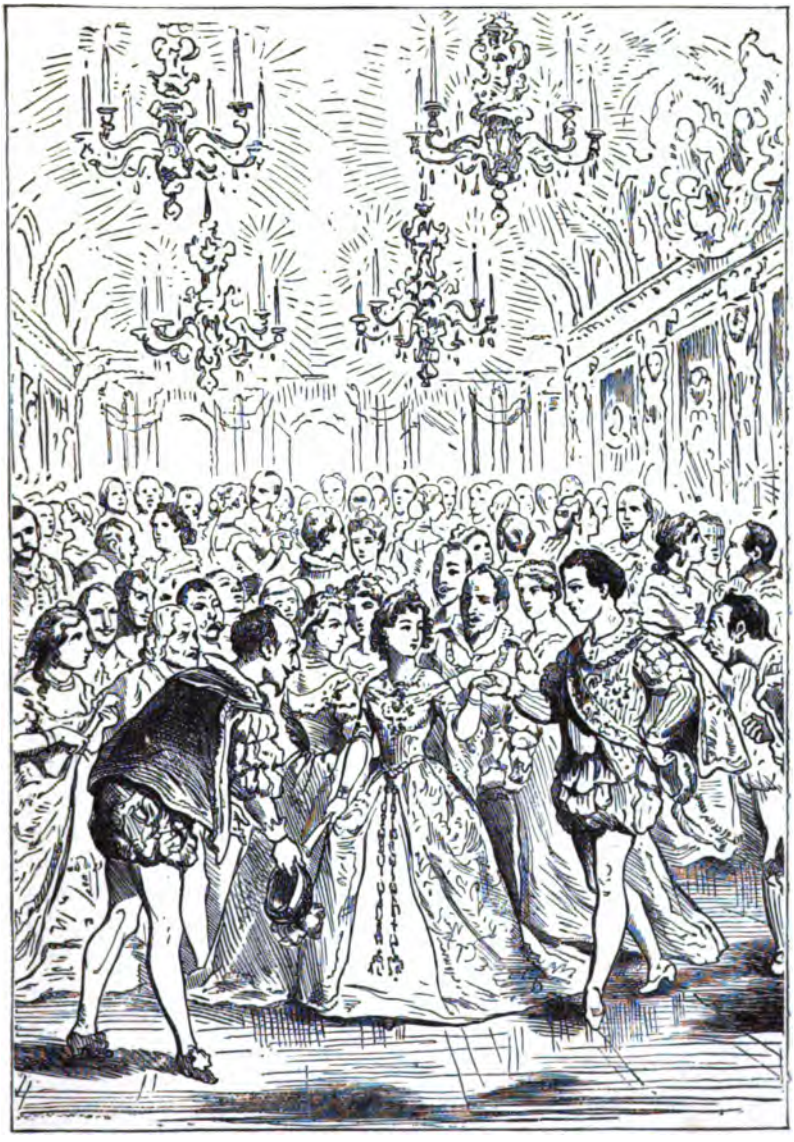
"Try them on," whispers a little bird in her ear. "They are a present from your friends."

How Ella tried on the feather shoes; how she found them fit her to perfection; how she ran back again into the house, like a young fawn; how quickly she dressed herself again in her beautiful apparel; how the Baron put his pipe out, and his velvet and lace coat on; how they laughed and chatted; how they admired one another, and how happy they were—need all this be told?

But something must be said of the grandeur and state of the ball to which they went. Princes are not entertained every day, as all the world knows, and it would not do to entertain them in an everyday manner.

But if it is stated that the room was crowded to suffocation; that it was brilliantly lighted; that the dresses were splendid, had there only been space enough to display them; that the floor was superb, had dancing only been possible; that the supper was magnificently unwholesome, and the supper-room so crowded with powdered lacqueys that no one else could get into it: then everybody who knows anything about such matters will at once perceive that the ball was a tremendous success. One happy result of the crush was, that as no one had the slightest chance of meeting the people he or she particularly wished to see, so no one need have feared being seen by any one else whom he or she particularly wished to avoid.

Consequently, when it was whispered all about the room that the Prince had fallen straight in love with a most beautiful and elegantly-attired foreign princess, and would neither dance with, or speak to, any other lady, everybody said, "Ill-mannered brute!" and stood on tiptoe to try and catch a glimpse o the



"Everybody tried to catch a glimpse of the happy beauty."

happy beauty—the Baroness and her daughters among the rest. But as everybody stood on tiptoe together, they didn't do themselves much good. And the Baroness and her daughters, being somewhat short of stature and short of sight, though they stood on tippest tiptoe all the time, went home without having the slightest idea that the belle of the evening, the observed of all observers, the chosen bride of the Prince, had been their own despised and badly-used Ella! Such, however, was actually the case.

The three ladies returned home in very bad humour. First, because they were tired; secondly, because they had not, either of them, danced with the Prince, nor even so much as seen him; thirdly, because they hadn't danced half as much as they would have liked; fourthly—that was the Baroness chiefly—because they hadn't had any supper to speak of; and, fifthly, because of everything in general.

V.

There can be no doubt that the Baron, when he took Ella to the ball, had intended to assert his position and authority as a husband and a father, and then and there to show the Baroness what he thought of her conduct. But when, as the evening passed on, the crowd being so very great, he never so much as caught sight of his wife and her daughters, the idea occurred to him that there was no absolute occasion why he should say anything about the matter. He was certainly, he argued, master of himself, and if he chose to bring his own child to a dance, why shouldn't he? The Baron was, as we have said, an easy-going, peaceable man. Moreover, he hated rows, and though, of course, he was not in the least afraid of his wife—who ever heard of a Baron who was not bold?—he did at certain moments feel that discretion was the better part of valour. At any rate, he felt sure that somebody had said so—and he rather fancied it was Solomon—he, or some other wise man. These were the thoughts which he turned slowly over and over in his mind, as he watched his daughter dancing and talking—we will not say flirting—with the Prince.

At length the Baron arrived at a solemn decision.

"Yes," he said to himself; "that will be best. We will just slip off quietly and say nothing about it." He looked at his watch.

"And—kettle-drums and pokers!" he went on, "it is time to be off, or Madam will catch us as it is!"

He made his way over to Ella. "Come, come, my dear, it is quite time to go," he said, a little anxiously. But Ella was just giving her hand to the Prince for a dance.

"One more, only one more, dear little papa," pleaded the girl. The Prince, too, put in his word.

"Of course, if your Serenest Highness desires it," says the Baron, bowing low. "But only this one—do you hear?" he whispers into Ella's ear as she moves off.

The Baron waits the progress of that dance with considerable impatience, and looks at his watch more than once. The fact is, people do not like to think that their horses are waiting out in the cold!

When at length the dance is finished, he hurries Ella away, dragging her after him through the crowd of silks and satins, in such a ruthless manner that Ella gets quite frightened.

"What is the matter, papa?" she asks, almost breathless, and squeezed and torn quite like a lady at a May drawing-room.

But the Baron, puffing and panting, drags her on, and never so much as draws breath until he finds himself safely in the carriage with his daughter beside him. Then, as the door is shut upon them, he, very red in the face, breathes a sigh of relief.

"That's all right," he says. "We shall get home first now; and if you'll take my advice, my dear—I mean, I don't think we'll say anything about it at all; shall we?"

"Just as you like, papa," says Ella.

"Well, my love, it isn't that I mind, you know, not in the least. But I think if the girls heard about the Prince, and that, they might feel hurt—jealous a little, perhaps. And one oughtn't to stir up bad feelings if one can help it, or give people unnecessary annoyance."

"No, papa, of course not."

So it happened that when the Baroness and her daughters returned an hour later, and, as we have said, a good deal out of humour, to the castle, they found Ella sitting up waiting for them, in her common every-day frock, as bright as a bird—not a bit tired or sleepy, and the Baron with his head as bad as it could be.

"Headache!" said the Baroness, shortly, when the Baron attempted to extract a little compassion from her. "If you'd been sitting all night in that stuffy ball-room, with your back against the wall, and not a bit of supper in your mouth, you'd have some right to talk about headaches!"

"I dare say I should, my dear," returned the Baron, meekly.

* * * * *

It was late on into the night before Ella lay down to rest. Even then, so excited was she by all the events of the past day, that she could not sleep, but lay wide awake for a long while, thinking and thinking; and when, at last, she did fall into a fitful slumber, it was but to dream.

Now it may be imagined that Ella's dreams would be of the most pleasing and harmonious kind—that in her sleep she would live over again the wonderful delights of that wonderful ball; that once more she would be tripping lightly with her princely partner through the dazzling halls of light, with strains of enchanting music, and low words of love still sounding in her ears. But, in truth, Ella's dreams had in them more of sadness than of joy, more of terror than of triumph.

It was not a purely pleasurable excitement that had kept her waking on her little bed through the long hours. She had a cause of uneasiness and regret of which we have not hitherto made mention.

When, on her return from the ball, she had proceeded to divest herself of all her beautiful garments and jewels, and to lock them away once more in the old oak chest, she had discovered, to her utter dismay, that one of her beautiful feather slippers was missing. The discovery filled her not only with regret, but with all manner of vague alarms.

They were fairy slippers—Ella felt no doubt of that. And she could scarcely dare to think what terrible results might ensue to herself or others from the loss of a gift of that kind. Then, too, what would her dear and grateful birds think of her for such carelessness! How could she possibly account to them for the loss? And yet how could she hope to conceal it from them—or, indeed, would she wish to do so?

Ella felt quite positive that the shoe had been on her foot during the whole evening, and up to the time of her last delightful dance

with the Prince. It must have been in the crush and struggle of her departure from the ball that it had slipped off—unless, indeed, the same fairy power which had presented it had removed it. This last thought was somehow rather alarming. Because, if one was taken, why not two? Was it, indeed, some benevolent fairy from whom they came, Ella thought, trembling; or had some malignant sprite imposed upon the birds, and induced them to be the means of bringing sorrow and perhaps destruction on their friend?

Thoughts and fears such as these racked the brain of our poor little heroine as she lay on her wakeful pillow, and tinged her dreams with melancholy. She dreamed of the ball, indeed. But she also dreamed that in the midst of it—just at the full tide of her enjoyment and triumph—a sudden change came; that at the striking of a clock all the beautiful garments and rare jewels disappeared; that her feather shoes went flying through the air in the form of birds; and that she was left in the midst of the gay throng, cowering and ashamed, covered only with rags—a beggar girl, whom the Prince ordered scornfully from his presence, when she attempted timidly to remind him of some of the pretty and flattering speeches he had made to his favourite partner during the dance.

Ella awoke with a shudder, to hear a soft rustling of wings about her head, as though a bird were hovering above her. In the dim half-light of dawn Ella fancied she could almost perceive its form, while, as something brushed her cheek, a voice distinctly whispered in her ear—

> "Wait for the light
> And all will come right."

Instinctively, Ella put her hand out on the coverlet to feel if the one feather shoe she had left there on the previous night were still there; but though she fumbled about for ever so long she could not feel it; and being at last very tired, she turned round and fell at once into a sound sleep.

This time she did not dream, but when she awoke in the full morning light, there was the feather slipper reposing comfortably by her side, where she had herself placed it.

VI.

ELLA roused herself, dressed, put the one feather shoe carefully away among her small treasures in a box, and prepared to set about her usual daily duties. But it must be confessed she felt a good deal upset and disorganised. Ella attributed this unusual feeling entirely to the loss of the shoe, and the anxiety she had suffered in consequence; we may perhaps fairly question whether the excitement of the ball and the late hours had not something to do with it. But what young lady ever yet admitted that she was tired after a dance?

The curious part of the matter was that the whole family seemed suffering the same symptoms, but each one had a different theory on the matter. The Baron's head really was very bad this morning, so bad that he hadn't a word to say on any subject. And the Baroness, being herself rather more cross than usual, said it served him right. Nobody quite knew what she meant. Probably she suspected her husband of having taken an extra glass of grog the night before. But the Baron, who in his secret soul felt guilty, thought that at any rate it would be safer for him not to inquire.

The Baroness was the only one of the party who was candid enough to confess that "it was that horrid stupid ball which had knocked her up."

The young ladies, though they both agreed that the ball had been stupid, were too cross to agree about anything else.

"I saw you eating lobster-salad," said Jemima-Anne to her sister. "That's what has disagreed with you. I knew it would."

"Eating fiddlesticks!" retorted Sophia-Matilda. "I told you my nerves were quite shaken by seeing that lady faint so near me. I thought I should have gone off myself."

"What a pity you didn't, dear! You might have made a little sensation *then*," says Jemima-Anne, emphasizing the last word.

"Don't be spiteful and old-maidish, dear," returned Sophia-Matilda, with a languid smile. "It makes you look even older than you are, and that isn't necessary, you know. Late hours certainly do affect one's appearance sadly—after a certain age."

"I've had the toothache all the week," says poor Jemima-Anne,

ruefully. "If I don't look so well as usual, it is easily accounted for."

This discussion takes place at a very late breakfast, at which the Baroness is present in her dressing-gown, and the young ladies in curl-papers. Ella is not there; she, not having very much appetite, nor desire for the companionship of her step-mother and sisters, has made her escape out of doors, and is now unbosoming her tale of mingled joy and grief to her feathered friends and confidants.

It is a lovely spring morning, the sun is shining brightly, the air is soft and balmy, and the birds—who have not been out to a ball—are in the blithest spirits. They have nothing but gay carols and pleasant words for their little friend to-day, and Ella's heart is cheered in spite of itself, though she cannot quite divest her mind of the unpleasant impression produced by her dream.

We, of course, know that dreams go by contraries, but Ella, it seems, had never heard the saying, or at least did not remember it.

She had scarcely got to the end of her adventures when her attention was suddenly aroused by a cloud of dust in the distance, and by the approaching tramp of horses' feet. It was an unusual sound in the neighbourhood of this quiet and lonely castle. Who could it be? As Ella asked herself the question, her heart began to beat with a new and strange kind of trepidation, and the colour came and went on her cheeks.

Was anything going to happen? she wondered vaguely.

Meantime the approaching horsemen are descried by the three ladies still sitting over their late breakfast in the castle.

"Whoever can this be coming up the ride?" says the Baroness.

"Perhaps it's the postman," suggests Sophia-Matilda, sleepily.

"The postman's been here hours ago! It must be the butcher coming for orders. What can he be about, tearing along like that?" says the Baroness.

Sophia-Matilda puts her head, all over curl-papers, out of the window, and then draws it in again quickly.

"My goodness me!" she cries.

At which Jemima-Anne immediately puts her head, curl-papers and all, out of window, too.

"It is—no, it isn't—it can't be——"

"What?" screams the Baroness, peeping over the heads of her daughters.

"Him!" returns Jemima-Anne, almost breathless.

"Who?" cries the Baroness.

"The Prince," returns Sophia-Matilda.

At which magic word all the three ladies make a bolt together towards the door of the apartment, and run a kind of steeple-chase over one another upstairs to their respective chambers. For the Baroness thinks of her dressing-gown, and the young ladies of their curl-papers, and each at the same moment remembers, with painful distinctness, that it is the height of bad manners to keep visitors, not to say royalty, waiting.

"Most haste," however, was never yet known to make "most speed." And it was some little time before the Baroness could get on her blue turban and pink satin dress, and before the sisters could untwist their glossy locks from the confining papers. Each of the young ladies is quite positive that the honour of the Prince's visit is due entirely to the repute of her own charms.

"He has heard of me, my dear, that's evident," Sophia-Matilda says, as she pulls out her last curl-paper.

"Of me, you mean, dear," returned Jemima-Anne, her mouth full of pins, as she tried to get her collar straight.

"No, dear, of me."

"Where is that child Ella, I wonder?" said Jemima-Anne.

"What does it matter where she is?" asked her sister.

"Only she might help us, you know. I'm so flurried, I do nothing but prick myself."

"Do be quick; aren't you ready? I'm going," said Sophia-Matilda.

"Stop! stop! you shan't go before me!" cried Jemima-Anne, bustling after her.

Very red in the face, from flurry and excitement, they rush downstairs, tumble over their mother as they descend, and so make their way to the presence of their illustrious visitor.

He is standing in the middle of the room—a small feather shoe in his hand.

"I am come," said he, smiling pleasantly on the Baroness, "to restore this little shoe to its owner, whom I believe, madam, to be

your daughter, and to carry away, with your permission, the young lady herself."

Each of the sisters gazes open-eyed at these astounding remarks; and as for the Baroness, she holds her turban tight on, to make sure that her head is not whirling round.

"Eh? your Royal Highness?" she says, quite bewildered.

"It was impossible not to be struck by the beauty and grace of your daughter," went on the Prince. "And my dearest wish in life is to make her my wife."

At this speech Jemima-Anne and Sophia-Matilda look daggers at one another, each thinking the Prince must mean the other.

"I'm sure your Royal Highness is *too* kind," says the Baroness.

"But where is she?" asks the Prince.

"Jemima-Anne, my noble child, step forward," says the proud mother. "It must be you, my hope and pride, my eldest-born. Or is it you, my little darling pet, my pretty, innocent Sophia-Matilda?—step forward, dearest."

The Prince's face falls.

"It is neither of these ladies, madam," he says. "I trust I have not been misinformed. The bride of my choice—my partner of last night—was young, slight, and beautiful. Yet I was credibly informed that she was the Baron's daughter. Has not the Baron another child?"

The Baroness and the young ladies look at one another.

"The Baron! Oh, well, yes; certainly, your Royal Highness. The Baron has a daughter, but—but you could hardly mean her. And besides, she wasn't at the ball. She is a mere child."

"I should like to question her," said the Prince.

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Cinderella!"

"How ridiculous!" said all the ladies together, under their breath; for, of course, they couldn't be rude to a Royal Highness's face.

"Cinderella! A pretty name!" said the Prince. "Pray, allow me at any rate to see the maiden."

The Baroness and her daughters laughed, but dared not refuse.

Go, Sophia-Matilda, love, and fetch the child," said her

mother. Then, turning to the Prince, "She is a sad pickle, and a terrible anxiety to me, I can assure your Highness."

"Really!" returned the Prince, who knew more about the matter than the Baroness fancied.

Presently, her heart beating fast, and her cheeks as pink as a freshly blown rose, Ella came timidly into the room, ushered in by the panting Sophia-Matilda.

The Prince went up to Ella at once, and held out his hand. Yet even he was a little struck by the difference which her common everyday frock made in her. Fine feathers, after all, *do* make fine birds.

"Is this my little Princess of last night?" he asked.

Then Ella looked timidly up at him, and said "Yes."

And as soon as the Prince saw the shine of her soft eyes, and heard the sound of her voice, he knew that it was indeed the same.

"I have brought a certain slipper," he said, smiling; "the daintiest shoe in the world, that could only be worn by the daintiest foot. And I have made a vow that the maiden whose foot shall fit that slipper I will seek to make my wife. Will you try it, lady?" he asked, turning to Ella.

And Ella saw that the shoe which the Prince held out to her was her own fairy feather slipper that she had lost at the ball.

Blushing and trembling with excitement, she was just about to take the slipper in her hand, when Jemima-Anne, pushing her rudely aside, said—

"Certainly, your Royal Highness, I shall have much pleasure."

The Prince began to look alarmed; but Ella only smiled, for she knew perfectly well that Jemima-Anne would never get the shoe on her foot.

Which turned out to be the case, though she pulled and tugged, and pulled with all her might.

At last, throwing the shoe down in a rage, she bounced out of the room.

Then Sophia-Matilda would try her turn, and, as her foot was certainly smaller, Ella's heart sank. But though she pulled and tugged, and pulled with all her might, the slipper would not come on.

But, as soon as Ella put it to her foot, it fitted like a glove.

"This is my chosen bride," said the Prince.

So the end of it all was that the Prince rode away then and there, with Ella on his horse, and made her his princess-bride

"This is my chosen bride."

into the bargain, and they two were as happy all their lives as they could possibly be.

One curious thing was, that, just as Ella was starting, she went to fetch her pretty pair of feather shoes which had stood

The Prince rode away, with Ella on his horse."

her in such good stead—the one that she had put away, and the one that the Prince had brought. But as soon as she touched

them, they took wings, and, turning into a pair of milk-white doves, hovered about her head and the Prince's all the way they rode along.

In course of time, the Prince became king, and our little heroine queen; and the Prince was so much taken by the name of Cinderella that he had her always called by it. They ruled for many years over their great kingdom of Knurseriworld, amid the love and devotion of all their subjects; and that is the way in which the name of Cinderella has become so widely known.

In conclusion, it ought to be stated that as Queen Cinderella delighted in making everybody happy, she did not revenge herself upon her unkind step-mother and sisters. She found handsome and young husbands for each of her sisters, and gave the Baroness enough money to buy a new turban every day in the week.

As for her dear papa, she never felt that she could do enough for him; but she did her best by giving him a magnificent castle, at one end of the kingdom, and the Baroness one at quite the other extremity.

And Queen Cinderella kept a great aviary, and made a law that whoever dared to shoot or ill-treat any bird was immediately to be killed and made into pigeon-pie.

COWARDY WILL.

THE big, cheery north-country fire is blazing and roaring merrily up the open chimney of the cottage kitchen. Though the spring is well advanced, the evenings are still chilly, and to-night the rain is playing a low monotonous tune, with wind accompaniment, against the window-panes, in a manner which makes the pleasant, balmy summer seem very far off indeed.

Before the hearth, seated on a low wooden stool, is a boy of some ten years of age. He is reading, his book held down so as to let the fire-light fall well upon it, and his head bent low over the book—the glow of the fire lighting up the face and dress of the boy to a ruddy brightness, like a figure out of some old Dutch painting.

A woman is seated at work, out of the circle of the fire-glow, beside a little table, on which supper is ready laid, and on which a candle is burning in an uneasy, spluttering manner.

The woman works silently; the boy reads silently. The crackling of fire and candle, and the loud ticking of a high, old-fashioned clock, are the only sounds within the room which keep company with the rattle of wind and rain without.

Every now and then the woman looks anxiously towards the window or towards the door, and seems to listen, but she says nothing. Presently she lays down her work to snuff the unruly candle, and then she glances at the clock and at the boy reading before the fire.

"Will," she says, "yo're just burning yo'r eyes out, and 'tis time yo went to bed. Put the book away, lad."

The boy glances up pleadingly, evidently unwilling to relinquish his favourite occupation.

"Shouldn't I wait till father comes?" he asks.

"I dunno when that'll be, to-night," returns the mother, sadly, "and 'tis late already. No, no; get to bed, Will, like a good lad."

As she speaks, however, a sound of far-off heavy footsteps reaches her ear, and her face brightens.

"There be father," she says, half-gladly, half-anxiously, going to the door to open it, and peering out through the gusty darkness. But the footsteps do not approach—they grow fainter and fainter in the distance.

"Na, I were wrong," she has to admit, after a minute or two of watching. "I canna think what keeps him so late." Then, turning to the boy, "But yo must not sit up, lad. Good-night to yo," she says, as she kisses him, "and dunnot forget to say yo'r prayer afore yo lay yourself down. Pray God to help us an' guide us, for it seems to me we shall want a bit o' both afore long."

"Yo seem sad-like, mother. What's amiss wi' yo?"

"Oh! naething, naething. I'm only just fearfu' and unbelieving, Will, and wanting to have everything my own way. And that's what naebody can have i' this world, ye see, lad; so," smiling, "do as I bid ye, and get yo to bed."

It was a full half-hour later that the tramp of a man's foot, firm and regular, was heard approaching the cottage. This time there was no mistake, and Mrs. Ryland sprang up only in time to open the door and admit her husband.

"Well, mon?" she asked, by way of greeting.

"Well, lass!"

"What's to tell?" asked the wife.

"Bad, bad—about as bad as can be. There'll be a lock-out. The men haud to their prices."

"A strike, Ben?"

"That's about it, Maggie."

The husband and wife look into one another's faces silently for a moment.

"And yo, what will yo do, Ben?"

"I mean to stand by the maester, I and some twenty others."

"Ah!" said his wife, with a sigh of relief, and then with a sudden change of face, sinking down on a chair, and putting her apron up to her eyes.

"Eh, wench, what is't?" asked Ben; "yo're not greeting at that, are yo?"

"Na, na; I'm main glad—main glad."

"Yo look it," said Ben, laughing a little hoarsely.

"I were thinking, though, of the trouble there'll be all about—of the suffering and the clemming, and the innocent children crying, and——"

"Well, well, Maggie, that's sad, too. It's sad to think that whenever there's a wrong done anyways, the hardest suffering comes on them as is innocent o' the offence. But there, I've tried my hardest. I've been trying all this night to make peace between one an' another—between the maesters and the men; but they won't none on 'em hear reason. They're all for a rise, and naething else will content 'em; they're just carried away like by one or two fire-eating chaps. But I don't hold to 'em; I don't think as how they're fair and reasonable; and for my part, I'm contented to go on as we've gone, happy enough and contented, this last ten year. And 'I'll stick to the maester,' says I, 'bully me an' yo like. A good maester is Mr. Burley, an' was kind to my wife when she were down wi' the fever and the little one were took. And an honest man, too; has paid me and yo many a pound of good money; and now, when times is bad, I won't turn agen' him.'"

"That was brave and outspoke, Ben, man," said his wife. "What had they to say agen' that?"

"Well, there was a deal of speechifying and rare talking; and some came over to my way of thinking; and lots of 'em didn't want to strike, only they were afeared to say so; and some on 'em called me a sneak, and some a knobstick, and said they—they——"

"Yes, Ben, what did they say?"

"Ah! well, they were just that hot and hasty, my dear, they didn't mean half, yo see."

"Oh, Ben!" cried Maggie, with a sudden outburst of terror, "they'll be doing yo a mischief, I know they will. If yo go to thwart 'em, they'll be waylaying yo and murdering yo. I mind me well o' the strike-time in Sheffield, when I were a girl—o' the misery, and the clemming, and the terror, and the dark deeds of it. Oh, Ben, man, the thought o' it frightens the very life out o' me."

"Eh! but there's no need to be so scared, lass. They won't do me no harm, poor fellows—not half so much as they'll do themselves, with their starving wives and little ones. They'll

maybe turn me the cold shoulder a bit; but 'a can bear that, 'a think, when 'a remember that their cold-shouldering will keep the fire burning here," pointing to his hearth, "and the flesh on thy cheeks, Maggie, and the loaf in the larder—eh? Dunnot think so?"

"But—it isn't only for sake of me that you're going agen' them all—is it, Ben? It's not only for the sake o' me that you're running into danger?"—she speaks the last word slowly and fearfully—"I would rather clem all my days than that, Ben."

"No, wench, no—I wouldn't go agen' my conscience, not even for your sake an' Will's—at least I hope not, I think not"—returns her husband—"but I haven't been tried so sore yet. I'm standing by the maester out o' conscience, Maggie, and I'm thankful to God that food and a' the other good things o' life stand on the same side. If it had been the other way, we must just have bided it."

"M'appen after all, the strike will blow over," said Maggie, as she and her husband sat down to their long-delayed supper of oatmeal porridge.

"M'appen it may," returned Ben—"please God it may;" but it was evident from the tone in which he spoke that he did not think the dispute between the employer and the employed would be settled without some sort of a struggle.

He was right.

Ben Ryland was one of several hundred men employed in a large Lancashire mill, the owner of which, Mr. Burley, was generally respected by his workpeople as an honest, just, and kindly-dealing man. There had always been the best possible feeling between him and his "hands." Many—Ben Ryland among the number—had been in his employment from boys, and could remember how, a generation ago, their fathers had been in the very places which they now occupied.

But latterly a new element had been introduced into the body of workmen, and a handful of turbulent spirits had been enough to excite a large body to discontent and rebellion.

It was a time when strikes were in fashion. For there is a fashion about these things as about everything else, and perhaps there is nothing in the world more infectious than the spirit of discontent.

Strikes were going on all over the country, and especially in Lancashire; strikes for higher wages, strikes for less work; and at length the majority of Mr. Burley's workmen, urged on by the example of those around them, resolved to demand certain concessions from their employer. Mr. Burley, though a kindly, was an old-fashioned man. He would not consent to innovations. He would not permit himself to be dictated to. Neither side would give way. The men had chosen a time for their revolt when business was pressing; when certain contracts had to be fulfilled by a certain date, and when the stoppage of the mill would be almost ruin to its owner. Still Mr. Burley remained firm, and in the end came the strike.

Out of the four or five hundred men employed in the mill, scarcely a tenth part stood true to the interests of the "maester." But by the aid of these few, among whom was Ben Ryland, and such extra "hands" as Mr. Burley could obtain at a day's notice—principally unskilled Irish labourers—the mill was kept open, and the work proceeded with in a languid, desultory fashion. But the strike was the occasion of much excitement and much ill-feeling in the village of Kirton, and Maggie Ryland's tremors on the score of her husband's safety were not altogether groundless. More than one hand-to-hand fight took place in the village between the opposing parties, and once Ben brought home with him a blackened eye and a cut forehead, caused by a stone which had been aimed at him. But, happily for the good fame of Kirton, no very terrible outrages were committed, such as have often disgraced the cause of the men during strikes in other and larger communities.

For the first few days after the strike began Mrs. Ryland had prevented Will from going to the village school.

"No lad, best not, best not," she had said, in answer to his inquiries on the point. Will, who was fond of school and of learning, was every day more restless and more disappointed. At length he appealed to his father.

"Father, why mayn't I go to the school?" he asked.

"Why? Ben't thee going, lad?"

"No, Ben," said his wife, colouring and hesitating a little; "in truth, I was afeard—don't be angry wi' me—I could na' bear to think o' him getting into troubles and danger as well as

thee, man—the twa of you together—and so I kept him to the house."

"Eh, now! I thonght yo'd more heart, Maggie," said her husband. "What wad yo make o' the lad? Wad yo have him always tied to his mother's tails, like a wench?"

"No, no, Ben."

"Then let him go, lass. He must learn to take the rough wi' the smooth i' this world, I reckon, and if his mates want to fight him, hasn't he got a pair o' fists and two stout arms to stand by, eh?"

"No, no, Ben; none o' that, none o' that," returned the mother, hastily. "I wunnot have my Will get into a fighting, rowdying way like the rough lads about here, he that has always been brought up peaceable and God-fearing."

"Well, well, Maggie, perhaps thou'rt right. Thou'rt always right i' the main," assented Ben; "though a man, I take it, is pretty much what the world makes him, and must suit himself a bit to his company. You don't find angels living among the other sort—at least not to say often"—he added, with a look of affection at his companion.

But it was settled that Will was to go to school as usual.

"And if they send you to Coventry, never yo mind, my lad; but just remember that's where yo'r father's been before yo, and that journeying's a gran' fine improving thing," said Ben, with a touch of grim pleasantry.

"And whatever yo do, or whatever they say, don't yo' go for to fight now, Will; do you hear? You must promise me," put in Maggie.

"Ay mother, I'll promise. What should I want to go fightin' for? I'm not a one to make quarrels."

"No, lad, no; but others might want to make them for thee. But yo'll mind the text, 'a soft answer,' and that other about the 'sufferin' long' and 'bearin' a' things,' wunnot ye?" asks the anxious mother.

"Yes, yes, I'll mind," says Will.

Even yet Maggie's heart is scarcely comforted. She stands by the cottage door the next morning to see her boy off on his way to school, and makes him repeat the promise he has already given. "Yo'll mind, lad—no fightin'," are her words of farewell.

Will nods and smiles in answer, and speeds merrily along in the pleasant spring sunshine, to the old schoolhouse at the far end of the village, where the young ideas of many generations have been taught to shoot in some sort of cramped and homely fashion. For the days of school-boards and school-commissioners are not as yet. And though Kirton itself is not without its marks of progress, in its cluster of tall chimneys and rows of hideously uniform red-brick cottages, the old temple of village learning is still left undisturbed in its antique simplicity. Hidden away in a quiet nook, behind the shade of a giant oak, it has hitherto managed to escape the remorseless eye and hand of the modern improver. A flight of stone steps, worn and broken by the constant feet of the young pilgrims to the shrine of the horn-book, leads to the schoolhouse, the walls and benches of which, covered with roughly-cut autographs and caricatures, bear witness of the attainments of a vast number of youthful aspirants after fame.

Will's reception by his schoolmates is not unfriendly, and Maggie's fears on her boy's account seem at first to have been needless. She awaits his return home anxiously.

"Well, lad, what did the' say to thee?" she asks.

"Naething, mother."

"Well, well, yo mun just be on yo'r guard. Yo're not well out o' th' wood yet."

Which was true. For it was evident to Will that day by day the tide of popularity ebbed a little away from him, and that, as the strike continued, and party feeling rose higher and higher in the village, his companions were inclined to regard Will somewhat in the light of an enemy, avoided him, and looked askance at him.

But no actual ill-feeling was shown to him until some ten days after his return to school.

Then it happened that he one day displaced from the head of the class a boy, by name Dan Ross, who was the son of one of the ringleaders of the strike. Dan chose to make the matter a personal affront. He was a quick, clever lad, older and bigger than Will, and somewhat of a ruling spirit in the school. And it was in truth more by inattention than stupidity that he had forfeited his position. The disgrace of being supplanted by a younger and duller boy was extremely annoying to him, and no sooner was school over than he proceeded to seek his revenge.

"What do yo mean by it, yo little beggar?" he asked, seizing Will roughly by the shoulder.

"Yo's more to blame than me, anyways. If yo'd learnt the book yo could 'a said it as well as me," returned Will, perhaps not in a very conciliatory tone, shaking himself free from Dan's detaining hand.

"Come, non o' that; I'm not a going to put up wi' impudence fra yo. I wunnot do it—a mean, skulking sneak as yo are! creepin' into other people's places—just because yo peered over the printed book, an' saw it all writ down plain."

"It's not true," said Will, indignantly; "I didna peer into th' book."

"What's that a'? do yo dare to gie me the lie?" shouted Dan Ross; "yo sneak, and son of a sneak!"

"My father's not a sneak," said Will, warmly; "he's as honest a man as yo'll see this twenty mile roun'."

"Hear him, hear him," cried Dan.

By this time a crowd of eager spectators—boys and girls—had assembled round the two disputants. They now began to act the part of chorus. "Have at 'im," cried one to Will. "Lick 'im," suggested another to Dan. The tide of popular feeling was on the side of Dan, yet for the sake of having a "fair fight," encouragements to Will were not wanting. It was the excitement of the arena on a diminutive scale.

Dan continued to hurl at Will, and at Will's father, every opprobrious epithet that he could think of.

Will threw back the lie as fiercely in his teeth.

The two boys squared their fists. A fight seem imminent. The youthful spectators applauded and encouraged. All at once, just as the clenched hands are raised, Will—his face crimson, his breast heaving—draws back.

"'A forgot," he says; "Dan Ross, 'a would like to fight yo—'a would dearly like to do it; but—'a cannot."

The little circle closes round in eager wonder.

"Yo *what*, Will Ryland?" they ask. "What's the matter? What is it?"

"Look at 'im. He hasn't got the pluck of a wench," cries Dan, contemptuously.

"It isn't that—it isn't that at a'."

"What is it then? What's wrong wi' yo?" demand one and another, disappointed of their expected amusement.

"'A promised 'a wouldna fight," says poor Will, ruefully, "and 'a cannot! 'a promised—mother."

At this announcement, a perfect yell of derision is raised, mingled with shouts of rude laughter.

"Then tak' that to yo'r mother, wi' my respects," says Dan, at the same moment giving Will a kick which sends him reeling.

At this fresh indignity Will almost turns upon the aggressor. His face flames, his eyes burn with a dangerous light; but with a violent effort he restrains himself, and making a desperate plunge through the little crowd, he breaks way and literally takes to his heels.

But his young assailants are not willing that he should put an end to their fun quite so quickly. They pursue him, shouting and yelling, boys and girls alike.

Will cannot make up his mind to go through the village with such a hue and cry at his heels.

At the bottom of the flight of stone steps he stops, and once more faces his pursuers.

"Cowardy Will! cowardy Will!" shouted a group of rough haired girls, pointing their fingers at him in derision.

"'A'm not a coward!" says poor Will, defiantly; "but 'a won't fight, because 'a've promised not, an' yo may jeer me as much as yo like, tho' 'a'd much rather fight than hear yo; but just yo go on as lang as yo like; say what yo will, and do what yo will, 'a wunnot stir."

With that Will laid his head down on his arms, and rested them on the wall by his side, and, in something of the spirit of the old martyrs, prepared to suffer all things rather than break faith with conscience. Happily his martyrdom did not last very long!

As he took no kind of notice of them, and never so much as raised his head, the children, after a while, grew tired of yelling and pointing at the immovable figure. When the victim ceased to show signs of annoyance or suffering, the fun of the amusement to the tormentors ceased. One or two kicked him, one or two threw a stone at him. Still he did not stir; and at length, with a

parting taunt of "Cowardy Will!" the little rabble moved on, and Will was left, as he thought and believed, alone. Then he raised his head.

II.

But Will was not alone. As he looked up, a pair of soft, black eyes, intently watching him, met his gaze, and a low voice, with a soft, Irish brogue, spoke to him.

"Sure ye're no coward at all, at all," said Black Eyes; "but a raal brave boy, ye are."

Will looked round with a sense of relief, to find that his persecutors had departed.

"And who may yo be?" he asked of the little maiden who had addressed him.

"I'm Norah, thin," said the child, holding out her hand to Will.

"Oh! yo're Norah, are yo? I dunnot mind to 'a seen yo here to school afore."

"Faith, and that's none so strange neither, since it's to-day, the very first day that ever I come," returned the girl.

"Ah! well, then, yo'd best not be seen talking wi' me, I reckon, or they'll m'appen hoot yo, like they 'a done me. Yo'd best be off t' house, wench."

But Norah seemed in no hurry to desert her new friend.

"I'd rather stay with ye," she said, simply. "Ye're a good boy, ye are, and they're a bauld bad lot, they others, an' that's thrue. And see, thin," she went on, "here's the blood trickling down your hand, where the stone's cut it."

"Oh!" said Will, "is it? It isn't *that* I mind so much as the hootin' and the yellin'."

"Yes, yes," interrupted Norah. "Don't I know? But ye remimbered what yer mother had tould ye?"

"I'd promised, yo see," put in Will.

"And a thrue gentleman, that's what ye are, to keep your word!" said Norah. "Ah!" she went on with a sigh, "I had a mother once."

"And haven't yo now?" asked Will, as they walked on together. "Where's she now?"

"She's lying alone over in the ould counthrie," said the girl,

sadly; "all alone, with the grass and the daisies growin' above her. And yet," she said, her face brightening," "d'ye know, sometimes of quiet nights, whin the stars are shinin' down upon me with their silver eyes, I think I see her eyes among them, smilin' and lookin' at me; but whin I cry to her and say, 'Mother, spake to me, won't ye?' niver a word comes—niver a word!"

"M'appen she can't speak wi' yo," said Will, "though she'd like to."

"That's thrue for ye," returned Norah, quickly; "she would if she could, the darlint."

"Poor wench!" said Will. "But yo'll ca' to mind, m'appen, what she used to say to yo—dunnot yo?"

"Yes, yes; many and many's the kind word, and the good, that she'd speak to me in the ould times when I was young."

"Ye're none so ould now," said Will.

"P'raps not," returned Norah, thoughtfully; "tho' it's a weary, weary mile of time since she went away and left me."

"Yet yo dunnot forget her?"

"Forget! Is't of forgettin' ye'd spake? No, no. Sure, ain't I comin' to the school just for love of her, and bekase she tould me, and bekase she thought so much of the book larnin', and bekase I know she's lookin' down at me every blessed moment! And isn't it for love of her that I spake the truth, and scorn to tell a lie, for fear o' bringin' a tear into her shinin' eyes, up among the stars?"

"Do you think it would?" asked Will.

"Sure, thin, I know it," said Norah, crimsoning all over her face; "for I've seen it."

"Have yo, though?"

Norah nodded.

"Tell me," said Will.

"It wasn't a raal bad lie neither," said the girl. "Just the laste taste in the world of an untruth; but it lay heavy on me, and whin I looked up that night at her darlint face in the quiet sky, it was all dim and sad and tearful, so that I could scarce see it, and that's the thruth."

After this the two children walked along for a few moments silently side by side. Then Will began asking his little companion

as to who she was, and what had brought her to Kirton. It seemed that she was the child of one of the Irish workmen whom the strike had attracted to the mill—a new arrival.

"And be'nt thee afeared to come to th' school; thee bit stranger lassie?" Will asked.

Norah shook her head and smiled.

"Sure don't I know that she's up there watchin' over me," she said. "And didn't she tell me, the darlint, niver to fear so long as I did the right thing and the good, and remimbered what she'd tould me."

"Eh!" said Will, with the air of a practical man of the world. "That's well enoo. But 'a reckon yo'll want a helpin' hand down on the earth too, i' these times. See wench," he said, after a moment's pause, "I'll be yo'r friend if yo'll let me, and there's my hand on't."

Just as the compact is sealed, Dan Ross and one or two other lads spring out at the pair from behind a low stone wall.

"Whisht! Rin, darlint, rin," whispers Norah, as a pebble whizzes by them. Another is flung, and grazes Norah's bare brown arm. The girl gives a little startled cry of surprise and pain.

"Cowardy Will! Cowardy Will!" shout the boys.

Will turns round fiercely.

"And what do yo ca' yo'rselves that would stone a wench!" he cries. "Be'nt yo ashamed o' sich a work?"

The rebuke is not without effect. One or two fall back, and throw away the pebbles with which they had armed themselves.

But Dan Ross calls out in a loud derisive voice, "And wha' do yo ca' him, lads, that would shelter behind his sweetheart?"

"Cowardy Will! Cowardy Will!" cry the boys, in chorus.

Will takes his little companion resolutely by the shoulders, and sets her in front by him, shielding her with his arms as well as he can from any side blows. Then he marches on, presenting, as Norah herself would have said, a *bould back* to the enemy, and receiving more than one missile in the rear. But the retreat is, at least, orderly, and Norah is deposited safely at her own door.

"Mother," says Will, as he enters the little kitchen where Maggie is standing over the fire, a big iron spoon in her hand, "yo maun just gie me back the promise about the fighting."

Mrs. Ryland almost drops the spoon she is holding into the fire.

"Eh! lad, what's got yo?" she asks, gazing in terror at Will's disordered hair and glistening eyes. "And, save us, there's bluid on yo'r hand, and on yo'r cheek."

"'Tis only a scratch that," returns the boy; "but, but"—and then, breathless with excitement, he tells the tale of his morning's adventures. "'A just bore it, mother," he says, simply, in conclusion, "because 'a promised; but 'a couldna do it agen. Yo wonnot ask it, will yo?"

Ben has entered unperceived during the recital, and stands at the threshold with his back against the open house-door. As Will ends his story, the father brushes something quickly off his cheek, which certainly had no business there, since there is a smile playing about the corners of his firm, well-cut mouth.

Maggie Ryland has sunk into a chair with her back to the door, so that she does not perceive her husband's entrance, and is rocking herself to and fro.

"Oh! Will, lad, what do you want me to say?" she asks—"that fighting's right, and peace and quietness wrong? Don't yo mind who said when ye were smit on the one cheek, yo should just turn the other? and why," she added, in a lower tone, "should yo want to go running into danger and trouble and blows, when yo might keep out o' 'em?"

"Mother, yo must just gie me back my promise," is all Will's answer.

"Maggie, lass," says an unexpected voice from the door, "the lad has done right well, and 'tis na fair to bind him down wi' sich like promises. There are times and seasons when the maist peaceful man i' the world is bound to defend himself."

Will gave a grateful look to his father. Maggie sighed.

"Oh! for the auld peaceful times!" she said.

"But ye'll trust me, wonnot yo, mother?" said Will, affectionately putting his arm round his mother's neck, and looking into her eyes.

"I dunnot know what to say, Will."

"That yo'll trust me, dear?"

"Well, well, I will, lad—I will," said the mother, with an effort, brushing away a tear.

"Thank you, mother," says Will, kissing her; grateful, but yet nowing little of the heart struggle which those few words have caused.

It is to Maggie the supreme and most unselfish moment of a mother's life, when she has to acknowledge to her anxious heart that the wings of the fledgling are strong enough to bear him without her aid; that henceforth the existence of the child must be merged in the fuller and freer life of the man. At such a moment she almost feels that the blessing and happiness of her motherhood are over—that the object of her so many cares and anxieties has deserted her—that her task is done.

It is left to later and calmer moments to discover that here, at his point, the greatest blessing of her motherhood is but beginning; that at the boundary-line, where authority gives place to influence, she does but lay down one sceptre to take up another, and that sceptre, if she but know how to grasp and wield it, a symbol of the most enduring, holiest, divinest power upon earth.

But Maggie, as she wipes her eyes with the corner of her apron, and takes the pot of boiled potatoes off the fire, can scarcely realize all this. She only feels that her child is beginning to be a child no more, and that her protecting mother-love is no longer able to shield him from danger and trouble and responsibility. The knowledge certainly costs her a pang.

So, like a wise woman, she bustles about and sets the dinner ready, and sweeps up the hearth. "Busy hands rob sorrow," says the proverb. And it is certain that no surer way of chasing petty cares and troubles is to be found than in loving, homely service for others.

Still, the mid-day meal is not a particularly cheerful one, and when, later on, Will takes up his book, to set off once more to school, the mother's heart quite fails her.

"Must yo' go, lad?" she asks, with a pathetic pleading tone.

"Yes, mother," says Will. "I wonnot like their by-word to come true. I wonnot like to show myself a coward."

Maggie sighs, but—"M'appen yo're right, dear," she says. "Yo're a good lad and a true, Will—you know how to keep to your word—and I'll just trust yo. I'll trust yo to do the right thing, and the best."

Will puts his arm round his mother and kisses her with a new

sense of manliness. And then she smiles, and watches him away, once more, from the cottage-door; tearful a little, but yet with a proud smile still lingering about the corners of her mouth.

The fledgling has spread his wings to the summer air, and the mother-bird can but stand at the edge of the nest and watch his flight with trembling eagerness until he floats far away out of her ken, but in the heart of the human mother there awakes, even in the midst of her anxiety, a new feeling of thankful pride in the thought, "I have gotten a man from the Lord"—a man to do and to dare. Not in so many words does Maggie express herself, yet they are all contained in the simple "God be wi' 'im," with which she turns once more back into her cottage, and to her homely cottage toils.

Will walks steadily on, thinking very deeply. Then he all at once stops, and takes a turn down a side lane to the cottage where he had left Norah in the morning.

The door is shut; he knocks, but there is no answer; he lifts the latch, but the room is empty. At the same moment, however, a dirty-looking Irishwoman, with a baby in her arms, enters from the back of the house and asks his business.

This, Will guesses, is Norah's stepmother, of whom the little girl had spoken—no very kindly person, it would seem, from her manner and appearance. From her Will, however, learns that Norah has already started for school, and breaking away from the woman in the middle of a lengthy complaint about things in general and the "throuble" of step-daughters in particular, he speeds on his way,

He feels almost certain that Norah will suffer at the hands of his schoolmates for her sympathy and support of him, and though he is resolved not to avenge his own quarrel, he is by no means so willing that his friend should be persecuted on his own account.

He is greeted more than once by the old cry of "Cowardy Will! Cowardy Will!" as he passes swiftly through the village, but so pre-occupied is he, that he scarcely notices the insult.

As he turns the corner of the lane which leads to the school-house, however, a noise and clamour of voices reaches him, which makes him redouble his pace.

It is not the merry shout of childish gladness, but the shrill yell of derision, the cry of the persecutor.

Will's heart beats with a loud, angry pulsation.

It is as he thought.

Norah is standing, the centre of a group of rough, evil-tongued lads, who are pointing at her with rude, outstretched hands, and taunting her with jibes and words of insult. Foremost among them, seated on the ground, is Will's old enemy, Dan Ross. He is inciting the other lads to fresh outrages. They are crowding about her, and have driven her backward, as it seems, against the grassy bank with which the lane is bordered. But there she has planted herself firmly—helpless, yet undaunted, and, with a certain, simple dignity, keeps her tormentors at bay.

They assail her with coarse epithets and rude jests. They taunt her for her Irish tongue, and for her "sweetheart, Cowardy Will."

"Ye're bould, bad boys," is all the answer she makes, though hot, angry tears start into her dark eyes. She throws her arm across them, that her persecutors may not have the satisfaction of seeing that she is crying.

The child might have stood there as a picture of resignation—her slender form drawn up erect and graceful, with bare brown arms and floating hair against a sunny background of soft green moss—her face set resolutely towards the evils she cannot escape, shrinking, yet determined, strong in the power of her passive endurance.

Will took in the whole scene at a glance, as he came upon the group.

"What's a' this?" he cries.

At the sound of his voice Norah looks up, her bright eyes shining through her tears, and makes a bound towards him. But the boys close round her, and Dan Ross—boldest of the crew—starts up from the ground, and seizes her by the arms. Norah struggled.

"Lave hould, will ye!" she cries.

"Let go the wench!" says Will, authoritatively.

"Do yo think I'd leave haud for your bidding, Cowardy Will?" retorts Dan.

"Leave go, do you hear?" repeats Will.

"Do'st want to go to your sweetheart?" asks Dan of the girl.

"Whisht, then, with your swateheart," says Norah, her cheeks aflame. "Lave hould, ye bould boy; lave hould!"

Dan tightens his grip on the girl.

"Not till yo've kissed me, my dear."

"Faith, ye may hould me for a month of Sundays before I'll do any such thing," cries Norah, with rising wrath.

"But you shall."

"But I won't, thin."

A sudden grip is laid on Dan's shoulder.

"Look here, Dan Ross," says Will, in a low, determined voice; "you'll just choose between the two; yo'll let the wench go, or you'll haud her. Which 'll it be?"

"I'll haud her. I'm obliged to yo, Cowardy Will, and yo may whistle for her, if yo've a mind."

"Once more, I tell yo—let her go!"

For answer, Dan raises his right arm to strike Will, but Will is prepared for the attack, and seizes the outstretched limb in such a determined manner that Dan, to defend himself, is compelled to let the struggling Norah go free.

"What do you mean by that, Cowardy?" asks Dan, his face white with passion. "What do you mean by it, 'a say?"

"I mean this," says Will, pale too, but determined—"Yo must give me yo're sacred oath never to bully the lass again—or——"

"What, Cowardy, what?" sneered Dan.

"I'll make yo," returns Will.

Dan laughs, but the laugh is somehow cut short by the sound of a sharp, well-directed blow, aimed straight between the eyes, which sends Dan down like a sack of coals.

Somewhat surprised, and considerably disconcerted, the boy picks himself up again.

"Do you mean fighting?" he asks, sullenly. "Hast plucked up heart, Cowardy?"

"As to that 'a dunno," returns Will, "but 'a mean to teach yo a lesson o' politeness one way or the other; yo can take it how yo like, Dan—peaceable an yo will; if not, the other way."

Once more an eager little crowd of spectators gathered round, hopeful of sport.

"'A thought ye wouldn't fight a while ago," says Dan.

"'A wouldn't fight now for ony bad names yo might ca' *me*," says Will, steadily; "but a'll fight any man o' yo that dares to lay a finger on the wench or speaks her a bad word."

At this point a little brown hand is laid imploringly on Will's arm.

"What would ye be afther, darlint? is it for me ye'd be forgettin' to remember yer mother?" says an eager voice at his ear. "Sure the varmint isn't worth soiling yer hands to fight him."

White with passion, Dan raises his clenched fist to strike the girl.

Dexterously, Will twisted her away out of reach, and stands before her.

Dan, foiled and irritated, throws himself savagely on Will. He is the elder and taller by two or three inches, but in his rage he exhausts himself. His blows, raining down without method or reason, fall wide. Will, calmer and firm as a rock, defends himself well, parries Dan's blows, and though he reserves his strength, he leaves his mark more than once upon his adversary.

As Dan loses breath, and what small amount of self-control he had left, he grows more and more savage in his attack. He turns upon Will literally with tooth and nail, and tries to throw him. His height gives him an advantage. The struggle is a severe one. Will is forced down on to one knee—a mist swims before his eyes—Dan raises his nailed boot to kick his enemy, but in so doing loses balance. Then Will gathers himself together, and with one intense concentrated effort wins the day. Dan lies on the ground breathless, and almost stunned, with Will's knee upon his chest.

There is a shout of applause from the little ring of spectators, for the popular voice is ever on the side of success, and they who had hunted down the victim of a few hours since with jibe and insult were equally ready to shout laudations now for the victor.

"Are yo going to murder me?" comes pantingly from prostrate Dan.

"Have yo had enough, and will yo promise to behave in the future?" asks Will.

"I'll promise fast enough," says Dan, with Will's fist very near his throat.

"Then get up," says the conqueror, "but see that yo keep your word, or I'll have to teach yo another lesson."

Dan rises as well as he can, and slinks off.

The school-bell is ringing.

"Look here, my lads," says Will, "if there's ony among yo wants to learn a lesson o' the same sort, I'll gie it him after school."

But nobody accepts the challenge, and the little crowd disperses quiet enough.

Will looks round for Norah; but she has disappeared. When they come out of school, he again looks for her—he does not see her. He waits. At length, among the very last to leave the school-house she comes, her head bent, her eyes red and swollen with crying. Will goes up to her, but she turns her head away.

"Norah! Norah, wench, what's wrong wi' yo?" asks Will, in surprise.

"Sure, thin, it's myself that's grieved and sorry for ye this day," she says, sadly. "For all ye've bate the bad bould boy, ye've done a mighty bad work in breaking your sacred word, and all for the sake of me. Och! sure, it was the last thing in life I'd have wished for."

"But yo're just a' wrong there, wench—and if yo'll come straight off now wi' me to mother, she'll tell yo."

Norah has fears, but Will seems to know how to combat them: and finally the two children, hand in hand, make their way to Mrs. Ryland's cottage.

At the door they meet Ben.

"Good news! good news!" he cries, gladly.

"What is't, father?"

"The strike's at an end, and we're a' going to be peaceable and happy once more."

Maggie, hearing her husband's voice, comes out to see what has happened.

"And 'a have licked Dan Ross," says Will, with an air of satisfaction, just as she appears.

"Is that what yo ca' being peaceable and happy?" asks Maggie, a little hotly.

"Sure thin, mem, wasn't it yourself gave him lave?" asks Norah, anxiously glancing from one to the other, with her bright black eyes. At which speech everybody, except Norah herself, laughs.

"And 'twas all for the sake of me," says the little maiden, shyly.

Ben glances kindly down upon her, and pats her head.

"Then a' do think he were i' the right, lass," he says, smiling; and Mrs. Ryland smiles too.

"Come ben the house, dearie," she says to Norah, "and tell us a' about it," eager, in spite of her disapproval of "such like doings," to hear the tale of her son's heroism.

It may be believed that Norah was not wanting in eloquence on the subject.

"Eh!" said the mother, proudly, when all was told, "I doubt they'll not ca' my lad Cowardy Will again."

WYLDA'S RIDE.

WYLDA was a little girl who, with a great many good qualities, possessed one which more than once brought her into difficulties, and this was self-confidence.

Now, we can hardly call self-confidence a fault or a bad quality, because it is, to a certain extent, a most necessary and useful one; and people who are wanting in it not only suffer a great deal of unnecessary pain and annoyance in their walk through the world, but are also often prevented by this want of confidence in themselves from becoming eminent men or women.

But self-confidence is one of those things of which it may be most emphatically said that "in moderation is virtue," for, from being a useful and valuable quality, it becomes, in excess, one of the most vicious, eating away all the good out of a person's character, and rendering him troublesome and ridiculous to every one about him.

Wylda, fortunately for herself and her friends, had not yet reached this terrible pass, but there is no knowing where she might have arrived had she not received one or two salutary checks in her somewhat dangerous course. At school she was known as a *good guesser*, by which you will, if you have ever been to school, dear reader, understand, not a clever "Puzzledom Pilgrim," or a quick finder out of conundrums. Wylda's talent consisted rather in never being at a loss with an answer. If she didn't know a thing, she guessed it, and looked as if she knew; and as she was sometimes fortunate enough to guess correctly, she often got the credit of knowing a great deal more than she really did. Sometimes, as may be imagined, she guessed quite wrong, and then a certain amount of confusion and ridicule did fall upon her; but even at such times Wylda knew how to extricate herself pretty cleverly, and her companions, better informed but more diffident than she, were apt to envy, even while they laughed at Wylda's assurance.

Wylda had a friend—of course, who could be at school without a friend? Her name was Gertrude; and the two were very devoted to one another. They sat together, they did their lessons together, they played together, they made all manner of monograms of W and G twisted this way and that, they learned duets on the piano, and though they quarrelled a little sometimes, they always made it up again; so that they may be considered a very model pair of friends indeed. Wylda was the ruling spirit, the bravest and the cleverest; but it may be doubted whether she did not owe more, perhaps, than she would have been willing to confess, to the plodding industry of her less brilliant companion.

"I never saw any one so clever as you, Wylda!" Gertrude would say to her sometimes. "You seem to know everything;" not, in her zealous admiration of her friend, perceiving that Wylda's knowledge was often only the gleanings of her own conscientious hard work. In truth, Gertrude had the greatest confidence in her friend's powers, and was willing to accord her something more than silent worship. And Wylda, on her part, was not ungrateful for this homage, nor was she wanting in a kind of chivalrous devotion for her true lover and humble adorer. Granted her own superiority, she was then ever foremost in proclaiming the merits, amiability, talents, and beauty of her friend; was ready to fight all manner of battles for her, and even to quarrel vigorously, if through modesty or forgetfulness she failed in maintaining the high position in the school which Wylda was determined that, as her chosen friend, she should hold.

It was at the end of their first year of school life and first "half" of friendship that Wylda was, at her friend's urgent entreaty, invited to pass a portion of the holidays at the house of Gertrude's parents.

When the letter came from Gertrude's mother, Mrs. Rogers, announcing to her little daughter that, "Your friend Wylda's mamma is very pleased that she should pay us a visit this summer," the delight of the two girls knew no bounds, and Miss Parsewell's usually decorous establishment was quite upset by their boisterous mirth.

"Isn't it nice?" cried one.

"Delightful!" returned the other. "Shan't we have fun?"

"Yes."

"And were you ever in Devonshire before?"

"N—no." Wylda hardly likes confessing to the fact. In truth, she is a town-child born and bred, and is, for some unknown and undiscoverable reason, a little ashamed of the fact.

"Oh! it is so lovely. The hills, and the lanes, and the flowers, and the ferns! What a deal I shall have to show you, shan't I?"

"Yes," says Wylda.

"And how they will all admire you at home, papa and mamma, and the boys, and Phœbe!" Phœbe was Gertrude's elder sister.

"Do you think your sister Phœbe will like me?" asks sharp-witted Wylda.

"Oh! I'm sure she will. Nobody could help it who sees you, dear. They will adore you, I know," is Gertrude's affectionate answer.

This prospect is a pleasant one, certainly. Wylda likes being adored. She is not quite so sure whether she will like being patronised or shown about by Gertrude—who is, to begin with, a year and a half younger than herself—but, on the whole, she does agree with her friend that it will be *great fun*. And every spare moment of the next three weeks is spent by the two little girls in eager anticipation of "what we shall do at Beechwood," and of the delights and pleasure in store.

"I wish you were coming home with me now at once," sighed Gertrude, when they were bidding one another adieu on the breaking-up day. "It's dreadful to think that I shan't see you for nearly a whole month. I shan't know what to do with myself."

"You can write to me," returned Wylda, consolingly.

"Oh! yes, of course. I will write every day a little bit—a sort of journal, you know, and you will do the same, won't you? and then we shall know everything that the other has been doing and thinking all the time."

This seemed to both the friends a most charming arrangement, and by means of it and an alarming expenditure of postage stamps the month's absence was rendered endurable.

"A month all but a day!" exclaimed Gertrude, as she at length embraced her friend with much warmth on the platform of the Beechwood station, where, together with a black box, she had been duly delivered by the guard, under whose care she had made her journey.

"Yes, it seems ages, Gertie dear," says Wylda. "I do believe you've grown."

"No; do you really? Oh! you darling, I am so glad to see you," returns Gertrude. "And now let me introduce you to all my people. Here, mamma," she cries, "here is my very dearest friend, the best, cleverest, nicest girl that ever was, and this"—taking Wylda's hand and dragging her up in front of a stout, pleasant-looking gentleman—"is my papa, and this young lady here is my sister Phœbe, and then there are the boys—Will and Herbert, where are they? Oh! well, you'll find us all out in time, dear, and we're all so glad to see you—you don't know."

Wylda's welcome was certainly not wanting in kindliness from any one member of the family, though it was scarcely to be expected, or perhaps desired, that Mr. and Mrs. or Miss Rogers should be quite so ecstatic in their reception of their young visitor as their little daughter had been. But they one and all made much of her, and exerted themselves to make her feel at her ease—a process which, in this case, did not present any very peculiar difficulties, as Wylda was happily not of a shy disposition. Before the first evening was over, she was as much at home with her new acquaintances as though she had passed half her life among them.

They, on their part, were enchanted with her. Gertrude's papa, a genial English squire, declared her to be "as nice and sensible a little girl as he had seen this many a day." Will, Gertie's eldest brother, made up his mind to marry her as soon as he was grown up. Herbert, his younger brother, not knowing of Will's resolve, determined on the same course. Mrs. Rogers thought her well-mannered and intelligent, and if Phœbe was not quite so enthusiastic in her praises as the rest of the family, she at least had nothing to say against her young sister's friend, but pronounced her to be "a nice child enough." So that, altogether, Wylda was a success at Beechwood, and Gertrude lived in a state of triumphant delight. As for Wylda herself, it need scarcely be said that she was happy. She liked nothing so much as being made much of—being appreciated, perhaps, she would have said; and she was all the more ready to be pleased with the attentions of her new friends, from the fact that for the last month—that is, during her stay at her own home—she had been, as she thought,

rather unduly suppressed. As one of the younger members of a large, struggling family, she naturally had to put up with some small rubs. "Mamma thinks only of the boys, and the boys think only of themselves," she would say sometimes, when speaking of her home affairs. At home she was expected to play that part in the social concert which is familiarly called "second fiddle," but the instrument was not very much to the young lady's liking, and she found the atmosphere of Beechwood very much more to her taste.

She was not a little pleased, too, with the luxury by which she found herself surrounded. Never had Wylda before lived in a state of so much magnificence; and she was not in the least embarrassed by any novelties with which she might meet, but carried herself with an air of quiet dignity, which impressed even Mrs. Rogers' French maid with a notion that she was a young lady "of consequence."

The only annoyance which Wylda experienced arose from her utter ignorance of country ways and things. As she had lived all her life in the heart of London, and rarely visited the country, except for a month once or twice at Margate or Ramsgate, this was not to be wondered at.

But Wylda's peculiarity was that she could not endure confessing ignorance of anything, consequently she tried her guessing plan in this instance, and talked with *an air* of crops, and flowers, and all manner of things of which she knew nothing, not without success in some instances, gleaning knowledge as she went. But she made a few unfortunate blunders, calling, for instance, the geese on the pond, swans, and admiring carrot-tops as beautiful ferns, to the extreme amusement even of her faithful friend and humble worshipper, Gertrude. And to be laughed at was always most unpleasant to Wylda. But to be laughed at by Gertrude was beyond endurance!

Still, on the whole, life at Beechwood was a pleasant enough thing to Wylda, and the account which, on the third day of her visit, she wrote home, describing all her doings and surroundings, was glowing in the extreme.

It was on the morning after this that the subject of a ride was broached at breakfast.

"Who's going to the meet to-morrow?" asked the Squire,

cheerily. "Gertie, child, I know you'd like to be there, on Blanche; and if our little lady here would enjoy a ride with you, I should think Prince Charlie would carry her nicely. What do you say, would you like it, my dear?"

"Oh, I should like it of all things," said Wylda, promptly—so promptly that Mrs. Rogers felt rather ashamed of herself for asking—

"I suppose you can ride, my dear—I mean, are you accustomed to do so? You are not timid?"

"No, I think not," says Wylda, blushing a little; "I have not ridden much, but——"

The genial voice of her host interrupts her.

"Ride! of course she can ride: I can see it in her eye! I expect she could take a horse across country as well as any of us—eh, my dear? Only think of a fine, intelligent girl like that not being able to ride!" laughed the hearty Squire.

After this it was really not to be expected that Wylda should confess that her equestrian performances had hitherto been confined to donkey gallops along Ramsgate sands. Her spirit rose with the occasion. She would be equal to any demands which were made upon her. And, besides, where was the difficulty? What Gertrude could do surely she was capable of! She had always had a great desire to ride, and "if I say I don't know anything about it, they won't like me to try," she argued, shrewdly enough. And there was no fear, she thought, but that she should "get along somehow."

"Prince Charlie will carry her like a lamb," said the Squire.

"Well, my dear, I don't know," said his wife; "he is rather troublesome to mount sometimes, and——"

"Pshaw, mere playfulness, not a bit of vice about him."

"And then the crowd at the meet always makes the horses a little fidgetty, doesn't it?"

"I know somebody else who is fidgetty, too," said Mr. Rogers, winking slily at his wife; "an infant might mount the Prince in safety. But I tell you what—let the girls have an hour's quiet ride this afternoon, and then little Missy here will see how she and her horse agree. Eh, what do you think of that? Perhaps I may be able to go with them."

So it was arranged—Wylda acquiescing in everything, and

beaming over with pleasure. How nice it would be to write home and tell them all about it, she thought.

"I am so glad that you are going to have a ride with me, darling," said little Gertrude to her friend, when the plan of operations was fixed. "It will be so nice, but I didn't know you could."

"Didn't you? And why shouldn't I as well as you?" asked Wylda, a little haughtily.

Which argument was quite unanswerable.

"No, of course not. How stupid of me! What a girl you are, Wylda! I do believe there's nothing in the world you couldn't do," exclaimed Gertie, admiringly.

Wylda smiled a pretty little deprecating smile, and kissed her friend to intimate that her rash speech was forgiven.

Wylda was perfectly delighted with herself when she saw her reflection in the wardrobe looking-glass, arrayed in sister Phœbe's riding costume. She trailed the long habit about the floor, then caught it gracefully up, and turned and twisted herself this way and that, in very great satisfaction.

"How I wish they could see me at home now!" she thought.

Gertrude came running into the room in her habit to see her friend.

"Are you ready?" and "Oh, you darling, how nice you do look! How well Phœbe's habit does for you, and how becoming it is, too!" she cries.

"Is it? Yes, I think a habit does suit me," says Wylda, placidly. But her heart does fail her a little when, having walked to the stable yard to mount, as was the old-established custom at Beechwood, she sees Prince Charlie, a tall grey horse, ready saddled, awaiting her.

"Isn't it a very tall horse?" she asks, a little falteringly, wondering how in the world she will ever get on his back.

"No, miss, not partickalar," says the groom, who is holding him.

"I'll mount first, dear," says Gertie, "because Prince is rather fidgetty if he is kept waiting. What a pity papa can't come with us after all, isn't it? However, John will take care of us."

Meanwhile, the little lady had vaulted lightly into her saddle.

"You had better take Prince Charlie to the mounting block,"

says Mrs. Rogers, who has accompanied the little girls to the stable yard. "He is less likely to fidget, and Miss Elliot will get more comfortably seated."

Prince Charlie, however, is not to be cheated out of his little bit of innocent play, block or no block, and it is more by good luck than good management that Wylda finds herself at last seated, not *very* securely, on his back.

"Does he always toss his head about like that?" she wonders.

"This is the curb, miss," says the groom, as he gives the reins into her hands. "I think you'd better ride him on the snaffle."

"Oh! very well. Am I on it all right now?" says poor Wylda, clutching rather hard at the reins, and wondering whether "the snaffle" is another word for saddle.

Prince Charlie begins dancing about in a most unpleasant manner.

"Don't curb him up like that. Give him more head, miss," cries the groom, taking hold of the bridle, to Wylda's intense relief.

"Whatever makes him go on in this way?" she asks, almost with tears in her eyes.

"Let him go easy, miss, and he'll be all right," says the man; "he takes a light hand, does the Prince. See, I'll hold his head a bit."

"You don't feel frightened, my dear, do you?" asks Mrs. Rogers, "because, if so, don't you go on any account."

"Oh! no, I—I'm not frightened, thank you?" says Wylda, biting her lips, to bring back the colour she feels has forsaken them.

"Would you," asks Gertie, who is now by her side, "would you like John to take you with the leading rein? If you don't feel quite comfortable, I would."

"Do *you* have it?" asks Wylda.

"Oh! no," says Gertie, smiling at the notion.

"Then why should I? No, thank you, I'd rather not."

The two horses are now going along quietly enough side by side, and the groom has left hold of the Prince's head.

"That's all right—now we shall go on well enough," says Gertrude. "I hope we shall have a nice ride."

"Yes. See, he's beginning to shake his head again."

"It's because you've got him on the curb too much. And, dear me, what a funny way you hold him!" exclaims Gertrude.

"Do I? Oh! I see you hold the reins differently; but, there are always a great many ways of doing the same things, aren't there? I daresay it's all the same in the end," says Wylda.

"Oh! perhaps so," assents Gertrude; "shall we have a little gentle trot in this field?"

The two horses set off together. But Wylda, at least, does not find the exercise a particularly gentle one. She is bumped remorselessly up and down with every movement of her steady-going steed, until her very bones seem to shake within her. She clings to her saddle with what force she may, with knees and hands, but unable to convince herself that the next jerk will not unseat her. Her breath goes—her side aches—still she holds on. Gertrude turns round to her.

"Isn't it nice?" she says. "The air is so fresh to-day, and—dear me, Wylda, are you ill? Stop, stop," she cries, "I believe you're going to faint."

Wylda makes a desperate effort to pull Prince up, by clutching spasmodically at the curb, but unfortunately, at the same moment, gives him a sharp cut, quite unintentionally, on the flank with her whip. The horse, unused to such bungling treatment, irritated by the awkwardness of his rider, longing for nothing better than a good canter over the pleasant field-grass, does exactly that which Wylda would have desired him not to do. Instead of stopping he gives his head a shake, which jerks the reins out of his rider's hands, sets off at a sharper trot than before, and, feeling himself uncontrolled, he presently changes his pace into something merging on a gallop.

"Wylda, Wylda!" cries Gertrude, reining up Blanche, and gazing horror-stricken at her friend's wild career, for she sees that she has completely lost control over her horse.

John, the groom, rides quickly up to his young mistress. "Don't you be afeared, miss; she be all right if she only knows how to sit on him," he says.

But unfortunately that was the very thing that Wylda did not know. And at last the high courage that had so far stood her in good stead failed her. At a sudden swerve which the horse

made she lost heart and hold together; she fell all in a heap on the ground, with her head against a stone.

Gertrude cried bitterly when, on riding up to the spot, poor Wylda was taken up, senseless and wounded, and insisted upon it that her friend was dead.

Fortunately no such direful tragedy followed on Wylda's ride; though a sprained foot and a cut forehead are in themselves quite sufficiently serious results: not to speak of a scar over the left eyebrow, which certainly no young lady would desire to have!

But we are happy to think that other results than these followed on this day's experience: that by it Wylda was taught more than one lesson useful to her in after life—learning, as we most of us do, only by our own downfalls, the grace of sweet humility.

OUT AT SEA.

"WHEW!" whistled Ralph Anstie, as he and the other lads, one afternoon, were noisily pouring out of school. It was his signal for calling about him his particular friends. Ralph was a big lad, active in all sports, though not very bright at his lessons. Looking round on the group, he said, ill-naturedly—

"I don't want you, Jem Wilmot, nor you, Ernest White, nor Dick Butler, either. There are eight of us, without you three. Be off!"

Those he had named slunk away, knowing that they had better do so. Ernest White, however, turned round and shouted back—

"Eight noodles are enough for any game!"

A stone flung by Ralph only just missed Ernest's leg, making him and the others beat a retreat quickly. Then Master Ralph marched his chosen friends down under the bottom wall of the rector's garden, fronting the sea, for it was a coasting village. When they had clustered in a ring around him, like goslings about a gander, he excitedly spoke to them—

"Boys! I have got a capital scheme. Who says 'Yes' to a day out at sea?"

All of the lads in turn shouted, "I do, I do."

"Then I'll tell you how we can manage it," Ralph loftily went on. "Old Banks is ill in bed with asthma; he won't be up for days. I know where his boat is tied; we can get it easily. It is only against the rocks, and he has left the oars in it."

The boys looked at one another with bright eyes. It was a scheme they all liked; but, then, they knew that old Banks was a rough, ill-tempered man.

"Don't be cowards!" scornfully said Ralph Anstie. "I'll get the boat out myself; why, you are a set of nincompoops! Aren't you going to take such a chance as this when we can get it?"

Instantly the whole group loudly applauded. Willie Carter, with just a shake in his voice, asked how far out they were to go?

"Much further than out of sight of land!" was Ralph's valiant reply. "We'll go as far as we can row."

Everybody again cheered. In a long noisy talk the expedition was fixed for the very next day. They settled to meet at half-past eight o'clock at the rocks. Each was to bring with him what food he could get. Just as they were parting, Herbert Leighton asked how they were to know the direction to steer? Ralph Anstie pulled out a small battered pocket-compass, which was among the treasures he carried about with him.

"Did you think, Herbert," he half-angrily shouted, "that I had forgotten the steering?"

The next morning came, and about half-past eight, the time fixed, one after another of the boys made his way to the stretch of white sandy beach, partly hidden by the rocks. At first Ralph Anstie was not there. But the others knew the cause of his absence, he was getting the boat for them. All stood watching the corner of the rocks. By-and-bye the nose of old Banks' boat came into view, and Ralph was seen stooping over the oars. His companions threw up their caps in his honour—not daring to shout, lest the noise should attract notice. In a couple of minutes he ran the boat upon the sand; then the food which they had brought was hastily stored in the bow. This having been done, a kind of review was held.

Ralph mysteriously bid them all keep under the shelter of the rocks. "Where," he demanded, "are Hugh Mason and Sam Wilkes? They are a couple of sneaks! But we won't wait for them."

It was found that Mason and Wilkes were missing from the muster.

"Here's one of them!" called out several voices.

A boy was seen running hard across the white sands towards them. Willie Carter said—

"That is not either Hugh Mason or Sam Wilkes—it is Luke Watson."

"Why, how does he know anything about it?" asked Ralph, in a passion. "Stand before the boat, all of you."

Nearer and nearer came Luke Watson, seeming to be hunting

his own black shadow across the beach. They soon saw that he looked very excited, panting for breath. When he still was fifty yards off, he began shouting, "You must not go to sea in that old boat without a man with you. You are going right into danger."

There had always been a sort of coolness between Ralph Anstie and Luke Watson. The latter was one of the quickest boys in the school. All the lads now turned their eyes to Ralph; they knew he would fall into a worse passion.

"I suppose," began Ralph, going forward towards Luke, "you will run back and say we have gone?"

"Yes, I will," was Luke's bold reply. "I overheard Sam Wilkes and Hugh Mason talking about it, and I persuaded them not to come."

"Oh, you did, did you, Mister Spy?" As he spoke, big Ralph turned and muttered something to the boys behind him.

In a moment they ran forward, surrounding Luke, and Ralph Anstie shouted—

"Into the boat with him! That is how to serve the cheat. We'll make him go with us instead of telling of us!"

Luke struggled all he could, but he was overmastered. A dozen hands clutched him, pushing him knee-deep through the water to the boat side, and then into it. There three of the lads held him down in the bottom. In scrambled the others, plash went the oars among the waves, and, pushing off, away they rowed.

"The Greeks and Romans used to have slaves," chuckled Ralph Anstie. He remembered so much as that of his schoo books. "We'll have a slave, for he shall row hard when we are fairly out."

Over the waves they sped, and shortly the land began to grow far away. Luke was then allowed to get up from the bottom of the boat. Ralph forced him on a bench and, putting an oar in his hand, bade him pull strongly. Luke knew he was in their power, so he obeyed; the others took the rowing in turn. To all their jeers Luke made no reply.

The sun was shining brightly, making the waves glitter like silver. For a time everything went well; they sang songs, told wild sea stories, and merrily ate the food. Some was given to "the slave," as they called Luke.

On they went, noisy in their merriment. Slowly the sun rose high above their heads, and then, after a while, began to decline. Still they pulled forward. Ralph Anstie said it would not be honourable for them to think of turning back till they were quite out of sight of land. At last, in a moment, all about them seemed to grow very solemn—the last grey streak of the coast was gone.

"We shall soon get back in sight of it," said Ralph, who was at the helm, looking at the pocket-compass in his hand. "Pull twelve strokes, and then we'll turn."

A minute later they did pull about. But, though they rowed on quickly, the coast did not heave up again into view. Time passed, but, in spite of pulling harder, nothing but the wide water stretched on every side.

"My compass must have gone wrong," shamefacedly said Ralph Anstie.

Sitting down to the oars himself, he rowed very hard. But it was of no use. That boatful of lads was adrift on the wide sea! They changed their direction again and again, but at last they gave up. What was the use of rowing when they did not know where the land lay? They turned very pale faces upon one another, letting the boat drift on the water.

Their only chance now was the humiliating one of being picked up by boats sent out from the village when Hugh Mason and Sam Wilkes explained how it was they were missing, or else in their being sighted by some ship. Early in the day, they had seen two vessels, but now not a sail showed anywhere. What was worse, a wind arose, and the waves began to swell, tossing the boat greatly.

Among the first to fall sick was big Ralph; he soon was lying at the bottom of the boat as helpless as a log. Some of the others, seeing him in this state, took courage, and said it was through him they were there. Tears were shed; one or two weak-hearted lads among them raised frightful howlings, for it was beginning to grow dark. That night there was no moon; they would only have the dim starlight. It grew very cold: higher and higher rose the waves, sending spray into the boat. This increased, till there was a danger of their being swamped. Nearly all were sick, but the most helpless was Ralph Anstie. The rest, however, had lost hope—all but one. That was Luke Watson, who gradually had

made his way to the bow of the boat. Getting upon his feet, he said—

"If you will obey me, I will be your captain."

Those who had enough strength left turned to him quite eagerly

now. The "slave" had become their master. Luke it was who saved the lives of them all during that long night. He divided

those who were not very sick into parties—some to bale the boat, others, by paddling, to keep her head to the wind.

"If we ever get safe in, Luke," moaned Ralph Anstie, trying to sit up in the bottom of the boat, very weak and ill, "you shall always be the leader. I'll obey you in the future."

Luke, who was busy doing everything that wanted doing, patted him soothingly on the shoulder, telling him to keep up his spirits. Wearily passed the dark hours. At last the sky reddened, and the great sun came up, finding most of the boys lying in the boat's bottom quite exhausted. But Luke Watson was still at his post, twice as strong as any of them. The secret of it all was that *he was the only boy there who had not done wrong.*

He hoisted an oar with a long string of handkerchiefs fastened to it.

Some hours later a ship perceived them, the officers and crew, as the vessel drew near, clustering on the bow, wondering what that boatful of boys drifting there meant. One after another they were drawn up the ship's tall side, taken on board and attended to. But the big ship had to go on its course, and the boys could not be landed till the next seaport was reached. From there a telegram was sent to their anxious parents.

It was noon the next day before they arrived at the village. All were in great disgrace, save Luke, who was the hero of the boys afterwards, and especially did Ralph Anstie praise him, having learnt a lesson from this rash adventure.

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